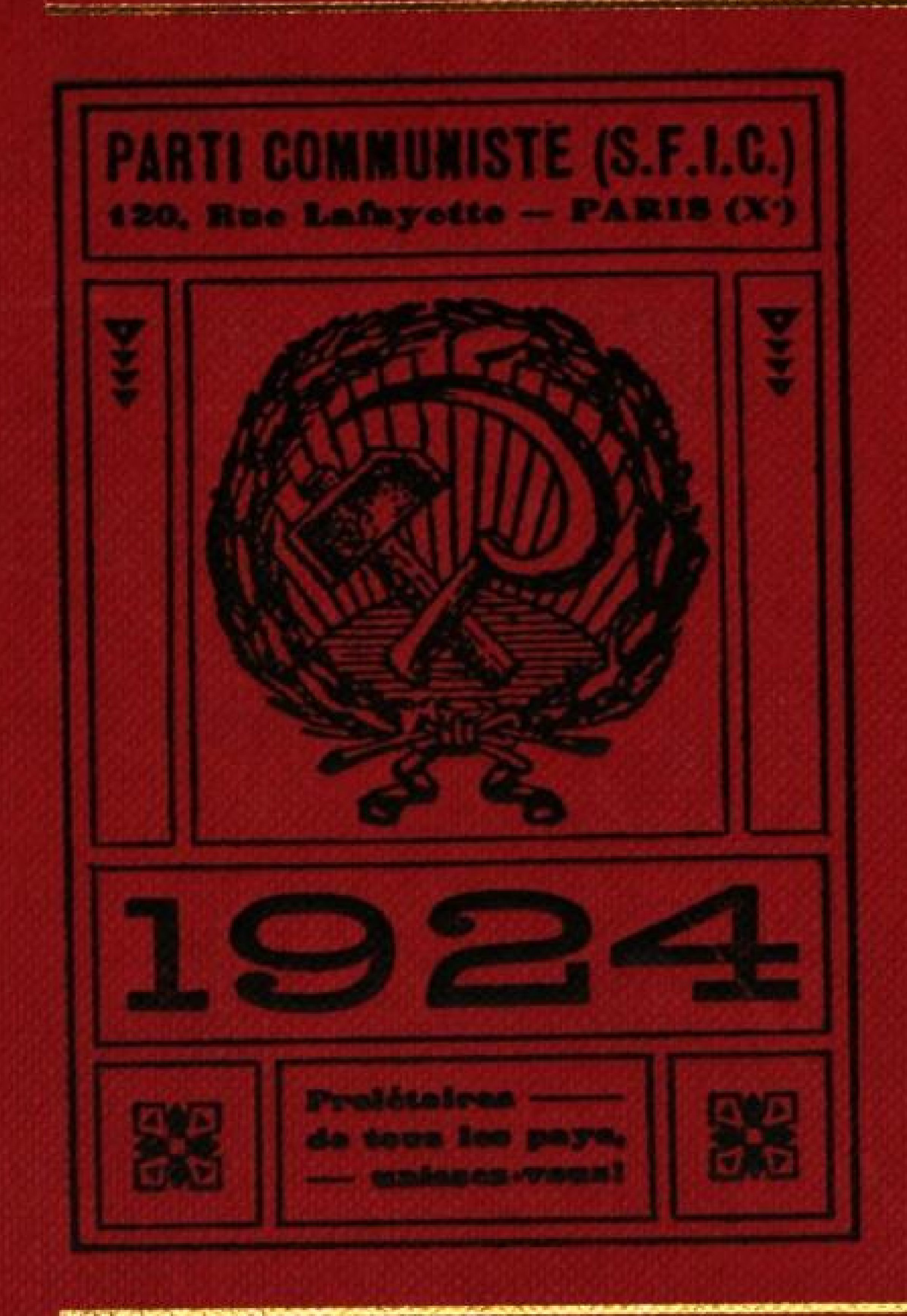
The French Communist party

a critical history (1920–84)

from Comintern to 'the colours of France'



M. ADERETH



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To Victor,

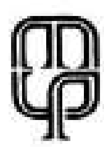
Mick and Lynn,

with gratitude

and affection

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Contents

Abbreviations

ARAC *Association Républicaine des Anciens Combattants* (ex-servicemen's association)

CC *Comité Central* (Central Committee, name of the PCF's Executive Committee since 1926) (see also CD and MC)

CD *Comité Directeur* (Management Committee, name of the PCF's Executive Committee until 1926) (see also CC and MC)

CDS *Centre des Démocrates Sociaux* (name taken by the MRP at the end of the 1960s) (see also MRP)

CFDT *Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail* (trade union confederation founded in 1964) (see also CFTC)

CFLN *Comité Français de Libération Nationale* (Provisional wartime French government; called itself Provisional Government in 1944)

CFTC *Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens* (trade union conferation of Christian workers; in 1964 the majority of its members formed the secular CFDT) (see also CFDT)

CGC *Confédération Générale des Cadres* (union of managerial staff)

CGT *Confédération Générale du Travail* (General Labour Confederation, founded in 1895; the largest trade union confederation in France)

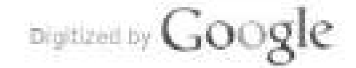
CGTU *Confédération Générale du Travail Unitaire* (founded in 1922 by the 'Red' militants expelled from the CGT; merged with the CGT in 1936)

CI Communist International, also known as Third International (see also Comintern) (see note below on the Internationals)

CIR *Convention des Institutions Républicaines* (a left-wing 'club' in the 1960s, headed by François Mitterrand)



CNE *Comité National des Ecrivains* (name of a broad committee of anti-German French writers, set up during the war)
CNR *Conseil National de la Résistance* (National Resistance Council, set up in May 1943 to bring together all Resistance groups)
COMAC *Comité Militaire d'Action* (the CNR's military wing) (see also CNR)
Cominform Communist Information Bureau (founded in 1947, dissolved in 1956)
Comintern Communist International (see also CI) (see note below on the Internationals)
CPC Communist Party of China
CPCz Communist Party of Czechoslovakia
CPGB Communist Party of Great Britain
CPSU Communist Party of the Soviet Union
ECCI Executive Committee of the Communist International
FEN *Fédération de l'Education Nationale* (teachers' union)
FFI *Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur* (set up in February 1944 to bring together all military Resistance groups)
FGDS *Fédération de la Gauche Démocrate et Socialiste* (name of the non-Communist Left Federation between 1965 and 1969)
FLN *Front de Libération Nationale* (name of the Algerian National Liberation Front which led the struggle for Algerian independence)
FO *Force Ouvrière* (a trade union confederation which broke away from the CGT in 1947)
FRG Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany)
FTP *Francs-Tireurs et Partisans* (name of the military Resistance group founded by the PCF)
GDR German Democratic Republic (East Germany)
IO *Internationale Ouvrière* (French name of the Labour or Second International) (see note below on the Internationals)
IRM *Institut de Recherches Marxistes* (founded in 1980 as a merger of the *Institut Maurice Thorez* and the *Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Marxistes*)
IWMA International Working Men's Association (name of the



First International, founded by Marx in 1864) (see note below on the Internationals)

- JC *Jeunesses Communistes* (name of the French Young Communists' separate organisation)
- MC Management Committee (English name of the PCF's Executive Committee until 1926) (see also CC and CD)
- MRG *Mouvement des Radicaux de Gauche* (name of the separate organisation set up by the Left Radicals)
- MRP *Mouvement Républicain Populaire* (christian-democratic party set up after the second world war) (see also CDS)
- OAS *Organisation de l'Armée Secrète* (name of the terroristic organisation founded in the 1960s by the partisans of *Algérie Française*)
- OS *Organisation Spéciale* (forerunner of the FTP) (see also FTP)
- PCF *Parti Communiste Français* (name of the French Communist Party since 1921)
- PCI *Partito Communista Italiano*
- POF *Parti Ouvrier Français* (name of the first French working-class party based on Marxism; founded in 1882 by Jules Guesde and Paul Lafargue)
- PPF *Parti Populaire Français* (name of the right-wing party founded by Jacques Doriot shortly after his expulsion from the PCF)
- PS *Parti Socialiste* (name taken by the French Socialist Party in 1969) (see also SFIO)
- PSU *Parti Socialiste Unifié* (founded in 1960 as a breakaway from the Socialist party)
- RPF *Rassemblement du Peuple Français* (founded by de Gaulle in 1947, replaced by the UNR in 1958) (see also UDR, UNR, RPR)
- RPR *Rassemblement pour la République* (name taken by the Gaullist party in 1976) (see also UDR, UNR)
- SFIC *Section Française de l'Internationale Communiste* (initials used by the French Communist Party, in addition to PCF, until the dissolution of the Communist International in 1943)
- SFIO *Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière*



(name taken by the French Socialist Party in 1905 and kept until 1969) (see also PS)

SNEsup *Syndicat National de l'Enseignement Supérieur* (union of university lecturers)

UDF *Union pour la Démocratie Française* (name of the centre–right coalition formed in the late 1970s which includes the main Radical party, the CDS, and Giscard d'Estaing's Republican party)

UDR *Union pour la Défense de la République* (name taken by the Gaullist party in the late 1960s) (see also RPR, UNR)

UDSR *Union Démocratique et Socialiste de la Résistance* (name of a small left-wing group founded in the 1950s, of which Mitterrand was a member)

UDT *Union Démocratique de Travail* (name of a 'left' Gaullist group in the 1960s)

UGSD *Union de la Gauche Socialiste et Démocratique* (electoral label adopted by the Socialists and the Left Radicals at the 1973 General Election)

UNEF *Union Nationale des Etudiants Français* (students' union)

UNR *Union pour la Nouvelle République* (name taken by the Gaullist party in 1958) (see also RPR, UDR)

URP *Union des Républicains de Progrès* (electoral label adopted by the Gaullist UDR, Giscard d'Estaing's Independent Republicans, and the centre at the 1973 General Election)

Note on the Internationals

First International:
Name given to the International Working Men's Association founded by Marx in 1864; dissolved in 1876

Second International:
Labour or Socialist International. Founded in 1889 and still in existence. Known in French as *Internationale Ouvrière*

Second-and-a-half International:
Founded in 1921 as a half-way house between the Socialist and Communist Internationals. Merged with the Second International in 1923

Third International:
Communist International (or Comintern). Founded by Lenin in 1919; dissolved in 1943

Fourth International:
Founded by Trotsky in 1938. Still in existence, but different bodies claim to represent it



Preface

The French Communist Party (designated throughout these pages by its initials PCF, which stand for *Parti Communiste Français*) occupies a special, almost unique position in France and in the world. It is, and has been for a long time, the mass party of the French working class; it has often played a crucial role in the nation's life, as for example in the Popular Front of the 1930s, the anti-Nazi Resistance of the 1940s, and the events of May–June 1968; at the time of writing it is the only western Communist party which is not in opposition, but is part of a left-wing coalition government; despite inevitable ups and downs, its electoral support in the post-war period has been consistently high; finally, although its membership is predominantly working-class, it also includes people from the urban and rural middle strata and an impressive number of intellectuals. For these reasons, a critical study of its past and present seems both timely and useful.

The following pages do not claim to be a fully scientific study of the PCF, partly because such a study can best be undertaken by a whole team of scholars rather than by a single individual, and partly because far too many documents are still not available to historians.[1] What I have endeavoured to provide is a general account of the main landmarks in the PCF's controversial history, seen as far as possible 'from the inside'. By this last phrase I mean that in addition to recording the facts I have tried to show how they were viewed by the participants themselves, leaders as well as ordinary members (whenever possible). This approach has not prevented me from making critical comments, which I offer as a stimulus for further discussion rather than as a definitive assessment. In writing about a party which often displayed dogmatic tendencies, especially before the 1960s, a critic should not himself be guilty of dogmatism, either favourable or hostile. On the whole, it seemed better to let people know what the PCF did and said, so that they could draw their own conclusions. Naturally I have not been entirely neutral, since it is impossible to write on human affairs without taking sides. As a Marxist, I am bound to feel a good deal of sympathy for the PCF, but I have tried to use my own sympathies to



get a better understanding of French Communists without ceasing to be critical of their behaviour.

As for my sources and references, the main one is of course the PCF's own documents and archives. The former include *L'Humanité*, the party's daily paper since its foundation; the *Cahiers du Communisme*, the Central Committee's monthly organ; other periodicals, such as the weekly *Révolution*;[2] and the many brochures, leaflets and the like put out by the party. With regard to the PCF's archives, many documents still remain confidential, but from the mid-1970s onwards, the team of PCF historians working at the IRM[3] have published a number of interesting documents, including minutes of meetings, debates and so on, together with clear introductory notes. This valuable work is still going on, and no doubt, will continue to throw further light on aspects of the party's history.

A second source of reference is constituted by the serious studies of the PCF which have already appeared. Two of them deal with the party's origins and early years, Annie Kriegel's *Aux origines du communisme français* (2 vols, Mouton, 1964),[4] and Robert Wohl's *French Communism in the making, 1914–1924* (Stanford University Press, 1966). Both are indispensable for further study, whether one agrees with their conclusions or not. The PCF's pre-war history is critically, yet sympathetically dealt with by Gérard Walter's *Histoire du Parti Communiste Français* (Somogy, 1948), and its history up to 1976 is covered by Jacques Fauvet's *Histoire du Parti Communiste Français* (Fayard, 1977),[5] an objective account, scrupulously fair, written from a 'liberal' point of view. Other general studies include Ronald Tiersky's *French Communism 1920–1972* (Columbia University Press, 1974), which gives a brief sketch of the party's development, followed by an interesting, controversial interpretation; and Philippe Robrieux's *Histoire intérieure du Parti Communiste* (4 vols, Fayard, 1980–4) and Edward Mortimer's *The Rise of the French Communist Party 1920–1947* (Faber & Faber, 1984). The last two of these came out after the present study was practically completed and ready to go to press, and so could not be referred to; but a brief assessment is given in the Note below.[6] Finally, on the PCF's side, there is the informative, but rather dull and uncritical textbook, *Histoire du Parti Communiste Français, Manuel* (Editions Sociales, 1964), a collective work, commissioned by the leadership; Claude Willard's short parallel study of the Socialist and Communist parties, *Socialisme et Communisme Français* (Armand

Colin, 1967, revised and enlarged 1978); the eleven scholarly studies which make up *Le PCF, Etapes et Problèmes* (Editions Sociales, 1981); and Danielle Tartakowsky's brief, yet informative study, *Une Histoire du PCF* (PUF, 1982). To these, one must add the useful studies of specific aspects of the party's history which have appeared, from time to time, in the *Cahiers d'Histoire de l'IRM* and its predecessor, *Cahiers d'Histoire de l'Institut Maurice Thorez.*

In the following pages, although every effort has been made to replace the PCF within the wider context of French society and French political life, no hypothesis has been put forward to account for the supposed 'strangeness' of the French Communist phenomenon, partly because there is no dearth of such hypotheses in other works (some of them quite interesting and thought-provoking), and partly because I do not believe that the existence of the PCF really needs a *special* explanation. In my view, and I hope this is illustrated in my study, the party's emergence and relative success are due to perfectly straightforward historical factors as well as to the attraction it was bound to exert on those who, for one reason or another, were opposed to the 'system'. I believe Dorothy Pickles expresses the same view when she writes:

> The strength of Communism in a country like France . . . with a highly individualist and critical approach to politics, is perhaps, at first sight, surprising. In the context of left-wing Republican and Revolutionary tradition it is less so. Part of the Communist party's strength comes from its claim to be, at the same time, Republican and Revolutionary, wholeheartedly Marxist and the most left-wing party. Its position of permanent opposition, since 1947 [this no longer applies today – M.A.], has given it ample opportunity to demonstrate its interest in the workers. Its closely-knit internal organization, based on occupational 'cells' more than on local branches, and its real (though not, of course, admitted) control of the oldest and strongest of the Trade Union organizations, the C.G.T. (*Confédération Générale du Travail*), have given it an efficient organization.
>
> Communism also has a strong ideological attraction for left-wing intellectuals, whose influence is strong in France in the numerous left-wing literary and political periodicals which are concerned with Communist doctrine as well as with current political problems.[7]

Finally, one word about terminology. I have not avoided Communist jargon – how could one do so in trying to understand a Communist party from the inside? – but, as a rule, whenever I have used words and phrases which are peculiar to Communists in general and to the PCF in particular, I have put them in inverted commas. All translations from the French are mine, unless otherwise stated.



Notes

1 Both these facts are admitted by non-Communist and Communist historians. Cf., for example, the Acts of the 1968 Colloquium organised by the *Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques*, in *Le Communisme en France* (Armand Colin, 1969), and the studies of PCF historians working at the *Institut de Recherches Marxistes* (IRM).

2 This periodical commenced publication in February 1980 and replaced both the cultural monthly, *La Nouvelle Critique*, and the political weekly, *France Nouvelle*.

3 The IRM was founded in 1980 as a merger of the former *Institut Maurice Thorez* and *Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Marxistes* (CERM).

4 Annie Kriegel is a former PCF member, now hostile to the party. Her study, although controversial, is informative and scholarly.

5 Fauvet's book first appeared in two volumes in 1964–5. The 1977 one-volume edition is a revised and extended version of the original.

6 Philippe Robrieux is a former PCF member, now hostile to the party. His 'internal history' claims to reveal what happens behind the scenes in the PCF. After the publication of his 1,800 -page study in three volumes, non-Communist critics hailed his work as a mine of information. However, his excessive reliance on private oral sources and on psychological analyses led to very critical reviews of his fourth volume (1984, 974 pp.) by Annie Kriegel in *Le Figaro* and by Professor J. J. Becker in *Le Monde* (March 1984). As for PCF historians, they were hostile from the start, and one of them, Roger Martelli, complained that Robrieux's work was 'without consistency despite its bulk' (*Cahiers d'Histoire de l'IRM*, No. 11, 1982, p. 123).

7 Dorothy Pickles, *The Fifth French Republic* (Methuen, 1964), p. 86.



Introduction

The PCF's distinctive character

It is difficult to follow the PCF's history without knowing something about its distinctive character and its own understanding of it. French Communists are fond of saying that their party is different from all others, and although on their lips 'different' means 'better' (a value judgement one does not have to share!) it is true that the PCF is different in at least three respects – its relationship to the French working class, its place in French society, and its links with international communism. On the first point, the standard Communist formula is that the PCF is 'the party of the working class', a phrase which does not primarily refer to the party's impact on the working class or to the predominantly proletarian origin of its membership but to the fact that far from appealing to the community as a whole, it deliberately proclaims that its starting point in all circumstances is the interests of the working class (as it sees them, of course). Even when the PCF stresses its national character, as it has done since the mid-1930s, it is always around the working class and *against* 'the bourgeoisie' that national unity is contemplated. This approach stems from the Marxist conception of the relationship between social classes and political parties, a relationship which, although very complex, boils down to the belief that the conflicting interests of conflicting classes find their political expression in the existence of different political parties. However, these parties do not merely reflect the views of a given class, they help to mould them. To use Marxist terminology, they are part of 'the superstructure' of society and thus enjoy 'relative autonomy'.[1] There is no automatic correlation between the behaviour of a party and that of the class it represents, for there are any number of 'mediations'[2] between them, but ultimately, Marxists contend that one cannot understand the former without reference to the latter. They also assert that a particular party may represent a group of classes (e.g. the French Radical–Socialist party which in the thirties was the party of the urban and rural petty-bourgeoisie) or a fraction of a class (e.g. the Social-democratic parties, attacked by Lenin as the champions of a privileged section of the working class,

the so-called 'labour aristocracy').

The PCF claim to be 'the party of the working class' is based on Marxist theory and on Communist tactics. The theory asserts that the working class is 'objectively revolutionary' because, independently of the subjective feelings of some of its members, it does not enjoy the full fruits of its labour and cannot put an end to its 'exploitation' (i.e. the fact that employers live off its labour) without putting an end to the capitalist system, without making a social 'revolution'. The word 'revolution' has not always had the same meaning for the PCF, but despite all variations (affecting the form rather than the content), it has consistently stood for the replacement of the present social order (in which profit is said to be king) by socialism (which promises greater prosperity through the people's ownership and control of the means of production). As 'the party of the working class', the PCF is therefore *ipso facto* a 'revolutionary party', the 'revolutionary vanguard' of the working class. As for the party's tactics, they have largely been determined in the light of the prevailing needs and mood of French workers (even when the overall *strategy* was worked out in conjunction with the Comintern in Moscow) and PCF leaders have been anxious to keep in mind Lenin's advice that the vanguard must generally be one step ahead of the whole class (otherwise it cannot lead it), but one step only (otherwise it cannot expect to be followed). That they have not always been successful in this respect will become plain in the course of this study, but we shall also see that they were seldom completely out of touch with French workers' feelings, except perhaps in 1927–9 and for a brief period in 1939.

Although it calls itself 'the party of the working class', the PCF does not claim that all workers follow its lead or indeed can ever do so, for it argues that capitalism does not automatically arouse the will to change it among its 'victims'. For a variety of reasons, personal, cultural, and above all their different experience, some workers fall under the influence of 'bourgeois ideology' and 'swallow' 'the bosses' propaganda' that all members of society have common interests. Others, in greater numbers, are tempted by 'reformism', a word we shall frequently come across in the course of this study, and which, in the Communist vocabulary, means the theory that reforms, jointly implemented by capitalists' and workers' representatives, can so improve the system that revolution becomes unnecessary. The present PCF view is that workers who are under 'reformist' influence cannot all become revolutionaries, but only a majority of them, whilst

the remainder can be won over to a policy of militant struggles for immediate objectives. This issue is at the heart of Communist–Socialist relations and we shall return to it more than once.

Finally, in the PCF's view, 'the party of the working class' is best suited to be the champion of other classes and strata which are oppressed by capitalism, and whose salvation depends on close unity with the labour movement. In the 1930s, the PCF took up the phrase coined by the Radical statesman Daladier, and called on all French men and women to unite against 'the two hundred families', i.e. the rich people who were allegedly the real rulers of France. Today, the phrase most commonly used is unity against 'a handful of monopolists'. A social category to which the PCF attaches special importance is the intelligentsia, and nowadays party spokesmen lay great emphasis on the alliance with intellectuals.

The PCF's place in French society is closely linked to its claim to be the revolutionary party of the working class. As a permanent challenger of existing institutions, French Communism did not expect and could not expect that it would ever become a constituent part of the present social fabric. Both through choice and outside opposition it has been and still is an outsider – though not necessarily an outcast, except during some periods of its history (e.g. the 1920s and the cold war decade). This has not prevented its ultra-left critics (such as Trotskyists in the 1930s and both Trotskyists and Maoists in the 1960s) from charging it with having become a conservative 'institution' which is now fully integrated within the system as a result of internal 'bureaucratisation' and external 'Soviet pressures'. We shall discuss these criticisms in due course.[3] On the other hand, many right-wing and liberal commentators have described the PCF as 'an alien body', either because it is controlled by Moscow (on this they agree with the ultra-left), a charge which is further examined below, or because it is fundamentally a '*contre-société*', a phrase coined by Annie Kriegel[4] and taken up by Ronald Tiersky,[5] who wisely translates it by 'countercommunity'. For Annie Kriegel, 'A communist party, imbedded in a country in which it does not hold power, functions as party-society: the countersociety which it constitutes in the interior of the global society prefigures the socialist society which it wishes to substitute for the established society after the conquest of power'.[6] Ronald Tiersky, quoting this statement, adds in a footnote: 'This conception does not imply, however, that the future regime is to be an exact reproduction of the Party institutions or the future society

an exact reproduction of the countercommunity.'[7] This important distinction is perhaps dismissed too quickly by Tiersky, who seems to underestimate the significance of the difference, strenuously asserted by the PCF, between party and society. Communists maintain that their party is a *voluntary* organisation, whereas human society obviously is not, and that they would not dream of imposing the same common outlook and discipline on the rest of society, either now or in the future.[8]

The belief that the PCF, or any Communist party for that matter, is a countercommunity rests on two aspects. One is that communism is more than ordinary politics but is seen by its followers as a new way of life. This is one of the very few aspects on which both Communists and non-Communists agree, but it hardly seems to justify the view that the party is a 'countercommunity', unless one were to apply the label to *all* groups which have their own *Weltanschauung*, the Christian churches for example. The very phrase 'countercommunity' suggests that in joining the party, Communists run away from the human community at large, in which presumably they find themselves misfits to a greater or lesser degree. It is an interesting hypothesis, which probably applies to a number of individual cases, but on the whole it is only a hypothesis. Dedication and attachment to the party may border on blind fanaticism, and at times have done so, but they do not necessarily lead to it, which is what the concept of 'countercommunity' implies, perhaps unwittingly. Moreover, the various 'mutations' of French Communism, recognised by all observers, and especially the changes which have taken place since 1968, have somewhat weakened the credibility of the myth that Communists move and have their being in some mysterious province, unfathomable to the outsider. For better or for worse, the PCF has now become part of the French political scenery, so to speak.

The other aspect is that the party has spent nearly all its life in opposition so that, according to the critics, it has had to develop an opposition mentality in order to survive. There is some truth in this, particularly when one looks at the cold war period, but even if we leave aside the PCF's short spell of ministerial participation in 1945–7, and the presence of Communists in the government since 1981, we shall find that French Communists have never been mere oppositionists, like a great many anarchists for example, but have urged either the setting up of *alternative* organs of power (like soviets) or the profound reform of existing institutions in order to



push democracy to its utmost limits (*'la démocratie poussée jusqu'au bout'*, as the 1976 22nd congress put it). For all these reasons, it seems that the concept of 'countercommunity' is not really adequate and should be replaced with that of *different* and/or *distinctive* community.

Moreover, like the working class which it claims to represent, the PCF is both part of the system and is opposed to it. It is part of the French political system inasmuch as, like all French parties, it has been influenced by French traditions, French customs and French culture, and also because it has played an important role in French local government since the 1930s. Quite a number of French people have been used for years to living in areas where there are Communist-controlled municipalities, and some who would not dream of voting for them in national elections are nevertheless quite content to be ruled by them at local level. On the other hand, the PCF's proclaimed objective is undoubtedly 'to change society', and because of this, it has invariably refused to be part of a broad 'consensus' and actually stressed that it is 'not a party like the others'. Despite all attacks on its organisational principles, including periodic outbursts by some of its members, it has doggedly stuck to them and, to date, shows no sign of being willing to allow the clashes among organised internal trends which are common in other political parties.

It is because of the PCF's unique place in French society that it is difficult to study its history as one would that of any 'ordinary' political party. Such an approach would hide the wood for the trees in the sense that it would describe the party's responses to the various events in the nation's history alongside the responses of other political forces, but would give disproportionate importance to outside events at the expense of the inner motivations of French Communists. Admittedly, the PCF has been and is as deeply affected as any party by developments which it did not and could not control, but its reaction to them has not been a purely empirical one. In other words, French political developments cannot *wholly* account for the PCF's behaviour. They should rather be seen as so many testing grounds for the application of a long-term strategy which is based on a comprehensive philosophical doctrine, Marxism. Marxism, of course, lays great stress on local and national peculiarities (even if the Communist movement and the PCF in particular only paid lip service to this aspect for a long time), but it also asserts that the change from capitalism to socialism, which is the *raison d'être* of all Communist

parties, is an international issue. To try and study the PCF outside the context of Marxism and the international Communist movement is really to have *Hamlet* without the Prince.

This naturally brings us to the third original characteristic of the PCF, its links with international Communism. We shall see that when the party was founded, it was as a section of a highly centralised organisation, the Communist International, and as it remained affiliated to it for twenty-three years, one should be aware of the chief landmarks in the Comintern's history. The latter can be divided into four distinct periods up to 1939,[9] and to this we should add two distinct phases between the outbreak of the second world war in 1939 and the International's dissolution in 1943.

The first period (1919–20) was dominated by the Communist belief that revolution in Europe was imminent. The Comintern's corresponding strategy was to hasten the formation in all European countries of revolutionary Communist parties, ready 'to lead the masses to revolution'. It listed twenty-one stringent conditions for affiliation. When after lengthy debates a majority of the French Socialist Party accepted these conditions, it became in effect the PCF.

The second period (1921–7) was characterised by the Communist realisation that European capitalism had entered a phase of 'partial stabilisation' and, consequently, that the prospects of a proletarian revolution had 'temporarily receded'. The Comintern's corresponding strategy was to call for united working-class resistance to 'the onslaught of the bourgeoisie', a strategy embodied in the slogan of the 'United Front'. The period was also that of 'bolshevisation', i.e. profound organisational reform of all Communist parties. On both issues, the PCF began by stubbornly fighting against the International.

The third period (1927–33) was dominated by the Communist assumption, largely initiated by Stalin, that 'social-democracy' (i.e. the Second International) was but a 'wing of fascism'. The Comintern's corresponding strategy was to advocate 'United Front from below', i.e. united action over the heads of and against the resistance of social-democratic leaders. The latter were dubbed 'social fascists'. Electorally, the main slogan was 'Class against class', i.e. working-class parties (Communists) against bourgeois parties (all others, including Socialists). For the Comintern as a whole, the period was one of narrow sectarianism; for most of its sections, including the PCF, it was one of political isolation.

The fourth period (1933–9) was marked by the Communist belated realisation of the fascist threat. The Comintern's corresponding strategy was to revive the United Front of Socialists and Communists in earnest (and successfully in a number of countries such as France) and broaden it into a Popular Front of workers and middle classes against fascism. The PCF's role was crucial and France was given as an example to others by the Comintern leadership. Organisationally, it was during that period (after the 1935 seventh and last congress) that the International's decentralisation left national Communist parties freer to determine their own day-to-day policies, provided 'proletarian internationalism' and loyalty to the USSR were preserved.

During the second world war, the Comintern went through two phases. *The first phase (September 1939–June 1941)* corresponded to the period when the Soviet Union was not involved in the war. It was characterised by the Comintern's rigid description of the war between Germany and the west as 'imperialist on both sides' and by its call for the conclusion of an immediate peace. This placed a number of Communist parties, including the PCF, in a very difficult position. *The second phase (June 1941–May 1943)* began when Hitler attacked the Soviet Union, which resulted in the formation of an Anglo-American–Soviet coalition. All Communist parties then supported 'the anti-fascist war'. The Comintern itself had little part to play apart from being an anti-Hitler propaganda machine. It was finally dissolved in 1943 as having outlived its usefulness.

For the whole of the Comintern's existence, it was regarded by its members as the 'world Communist Party', and since the Russian Bolshevik section was the only one to have gained power, it became, in theory as well as in practice, the leading body within the International. Moreover, loyalty to the Soviet Union, 'the first land of socialism', became the touchstone of 'proletarian internationalism'. As far as the PCF is concerned, it is therefore tempting to conclude, as many western critics have done, that it took its 'orders from Moscow'. However, the PCF itself claims that it never had to 'obey' the Comintern but that it took part as an equal partner in the collective elaboration of its policies. The trouble about reaching a balanced view on this issue is that one has to disentangle facts from motives. On the facts themselves, there can hardly be any disagreement, since both non-Communists and Communists recognise that the Comintern *was* centralised and that it *did* itself assert that the global strategy of world communism *had* to take the interests of the Soviet Union into

account. When we come to motives, it is a different kettle of fish. To the non-Communist view that the Soviet leaders 'used' the Comintern as an agency through which they could extend their country's influence as a world power, the Communists oppose the view that the aim of the Comintern was world revolution, not the strengthening of a big power. As nearly all the International's moves could be interpreted in either way, according to one's political beliefs, it is not possible for the historian who is not a mind reader to pursue the matter. We get on firmer ground when we look at the actual way in which the relationship between the International and one of its sections (the PCF for our purpose) did in fact evolve over the years. The following chapters will show that there were repeated clashes between the PCF and the CI until 1924 and that these culminated in the International's victory; that minor clashes occurred between 1925 and 1934, but that they were far less serious and did not question the CI's authority as such; that the 1934–8 Popular Front policy was jointly arrived at by the Comintern and the PCF, with the latter playing at one stage a pioneering role; and finally that loyalty to the Comintern in 1939–40 put the PCF in an untenable position of having to denounce 'the imperialist war' on the one hand and continue to call itself 'anti-fascist' on the other.

After the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943, the Bolshevik Party, renamed Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1952 (CPSU), continued to be the leading party in the movement, despite the coming to power of other Communist parties, first in eastern Europe and later in China and the Far East. The CPSU's authority was no longer organisational, but ideological and even emotional, but this made it greater, not smaller. The PCF, for example, took up the label 'Stalinist' as a matter of pride and proclaimed its 'unconditional attachment to the Soviet Union'. Again, one is tempted to speak of complete dependence on Moscow, to be met once more by the Communist protest that the PCF has always been an independent party, in name as well as in fact. The truth probably lies between the two extremes, and it is interesting to note that a number of non-Communist scholars refuse to explain the PCF's policies by *sole* reference to 'Moscow', whilst an increasing number of contemporary PCF historians no longer deny that 'in the past' their party was not always a completely free agent. However, what is more useful than a sweeping general statement, allegedly valid for all periods of the PCF's history, is to examine the three phases through which the

PCF–USSR relations went from 1945 to the present day.

The first phase (1945–56) may be called the post-war Stalinist phase.[10] It began with the PCF's cautious attempt to evolve a specifically 'French road to socialism' (Thorez's *Times* interview in 1946),[11] but the start of the cold war soon put paid to that, and when the Cominform was founded in 1947 (with PCF participation), although it claimed not to be a resurrected Comintern, all CPs looked upon it as authoritative. They all echoed its 1948 condemnation of Tito as a 'nationalist deviationist' and they all defended the rigged trials which took place in eastern Europe in the early 1950s.

The second phase (1956–68) may be called the post-20th congress phase. The PCF publicly endorsed the criticism of Stalin made at the 20th congress of the CPSU, despite the private misgivings of some of its leaders. It refrained from voicing any disagreement with the CPSU until 1964, but instead, came wholly on its side against Mao Tse Tung. In 1964, mild criticisms of the USSR began to appear in the PCF press, but the French CP remained the CPSU's most loyal ally within the international Communist movement, in sharp contrast with the Italian party.

The third phase (1968 to the present day) may be called the period of 'socialism in the colours of France', marking a fully independent international position. In the early 1970s, the media began to apply the label 'Euro-communist' to the PCF, but this, as we shall see (cf. Note below), is a most misleading label. What matters much more than labels is that the PCF's show of independence began dramatically in the summer of 1968 when it condemned Soviet military intervention in Czechoslovakia. At the end of 1968, the party adopted a Manifesto which, for the first time in French Communist history, outlined a 'French road to socialism' which owed nothing to the Soviet or any other 'model'. This new approach brought together the French and Italian Communist parties, and above all, witnessed unprecedented attacks on the Soviet government for its stand on human rights, especially at the 1976 22nd PCF congress. Since 1978, there has been a marked change of emphasis, with the PCF stressing that the socialist countries' 'balance-sheet is globally positive', but a return to the 'unconditionality' of the past seems most unlikely since the party continues to assert its independence and to criticise what it calls 'the limitations on democracy' which still exist in the Soviet Union.[12]

Note on 'Euro-communism'

The term 'Euro-communism' is a media creation which the PCF never really liked, and which it has dropped altogether since 1978 as a description of its own strategy. Although it is still used by a number of non-Communist critics, it is a very misleading label, since its anti-Soviet, 'revisionist'[13] and 'reformist' implications (e.g. the outlook of the Spanish Communist leadership) do not apply to the PCF. For this reason the label is seldom used in this study, but as it proved unavoidable on a few occasions, it is worth stressing that the PCF's own brand of what was called the 'Euro-communist' approach was made up of a number of original factors, of which the following four stand out: first, the rejection of all 'models', on the ground that French socialism must be built 'in the colours of France' (but independence from, say, Moscow does not mean hostility to or the denigration of Moscow); secondly, an attitude of critical, but solid support for all the socialist countries and for the world revolutionary forces, which stresses their achievements whilst not being blind to their faults; thirdly, a commitment to a peaceful, democratic revolution, which means that the long-standing aim of abolishing capitalist property relations and ousting the bourgeoisie from power (revolution) remains, even though the form through which the goal is to be achieved has changed in accordance with present-day realities; and lastly, a strategy based on the building of a broad popular alliance, but with continued emphasis on the leading role of the working class, on the need to wage 'the class struggle', and on the class character of Communist politics. Readers are asked to keep these important points in mind every time they come across the phrase 'Euro-communism' in the course of this study, especially in Chapter 7 and in Chapter 8.

Note on the Comintern

The sub-title of this book, *From Comintern to 'the colours of France'*, implies that the PCF's history should be seen as an advance from the lower stage of dependence on the Comintern to the higher stage of autonomy and maturity. This is indeed how modern French Communists interpret their party's evolution. But it is fair to add that, in their opinion, the 'lower stage' was not a regrettable aberration, but rather a necessary phase through which the PCF had to go before it could stand on its own feet. From a mechanistic point of view, 'socialism in the colours of France' is the negation pure and simple of what the Comintern stood for; from a dialectical point of view, the

Third International was itself an indispensable negation of the 'social chauvinism' of Socialist parties in 1914, whilst the present independence of Communist parties, of the PCF in particular, is a negation of the negation: it stresses autonomy, but not at the expense of international solidarity.

Notes

1 According to Marx, the 'real foundation' of society is its economic infrastructure, but, on this basis, there arise a number of political, legal, cultural, and ideological 'superstructures' through which human beings become conscious of social conflicts and fight them out. Engels suggested that the superstructures, although never fully independent in respect of economic foundations, also develop according to their own inner logic, thus enjoying a 'relative autonomy'.

2 The term 'mediations' designates the various stages or layers through which a given social phenomenon can influence another. For example, the mediations through which people become Communists may be their family, their educational experience, their work background, etc.

3 Cf. in particular Ch. 3, pp. 86–7; Ch. 4, p. 127; and Ch. 5, pp. 193–4.

4 Cf. Annie Kriegel, *Les Communistes français* (Seuil, 1970) (English version: *The French Communists*, Chicago UP, 1972).

5 Cf. R. Tiersky, *op. cit.*

6 A. Kriegel, quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 312–13.

7 R. Tiersky, *ibid.*, p. 313, n. 4.

8 This is linked to the issue of 'pluralism', which is discussed in Ch. 7, pp. 210–11.

9 The periods into which, for the sake of clarity, the Comintern's history has been divided by the present writer should not be confused with 'the three periods' into which the Comintern itself divided the modern epoch: 'the first period' (1914–20) was said to be that of the first world war and its revolutionary sequels; 'the second period' (1920–7) was supposed to be that of 'the partial stabilisation of capitalism'; and 'the third period' (which began in 1928, the year when the CI's periodisation was formulated) was declared to be that of 'the last throes of capitalism and the eve of the proletarian revolution'. The Comintern's policies which corresponded to the so-called 'third period' were the most sectarian in its history.

10 Although Stalin himself died in 1953, de-Stalinisation began in 1956, after the 20th congress of the CPSU.

11 For further details, cf. Ch. 5, p. 144.

12 For further details about the last two phases, cf. Ch. 8, which is wholly devoted to the relations between the PCF and the international Communist movement since 1947.



13 In the Communist vocabulary, 'revisionism' describes the attempt to 'revise' Marxism by playing down, or ignoring altogether, its revolutionary content. It arose towards the end of the nineteenth century (cf. Ch. 1, p. 15) and is constantly reappearing, in one form or another, in the working-class and Communist movement.

CHAPTER 1

Origins and birth (1880–1920)

Direct and indirect influences

Like most Communist parties, the PCF is 'the child of the marriage of two ill-assorted partners, a national left and the October Revolution'.[1] Its distant forerunners were the nineteenth-century socialist and communist thinkers such as Saint-Simon, Fourier, Proudhon, Blanqui, Jaurès and Guesde[2] and the nineteenth-century French working-class movement. The former all left their mark on the PCF, either because the party incorporated their views into its theory and practice or because it felt the need to react against them.[3] The latter provided French Communists with a rich tradition of working-class militancy to draw upon, especially the workers' involvement in the revolutions of 1830 and 1848,[4] and with the first 'model' (according to Marxists) of a proletarian state, the 1871 Paris Commune.[5] On the other hand, the fragmentation of French socialism until 1905 (due to the country's industrial backwardness, to the great differences among workers, both in terms of wages and the size of firms which employed them, and to the rivalry among many ideological trends), the slow growth of trade unionism,[6] and the constant clashes between unions, which were largely anarcho-syndicalist,[7] and socialist groups and parties, which tried to play a political role, did not facilitate the creation of a party which combined socialist doctrine with working-class roots. In the end, such a party was founded, but only in 1879–82. It can be considered as the PCF's direct ancestor, and like its grandchild, it was firmly based on Marxism.

The chief difference between Marxism and other trends is that it brought together socialist theory and the organised labour movement. It claimed to give a 'scientific' interpretation of history by linking the existence of social classes with the level of production,[8] it forecast the abolition of all classes as a result of a 'proletarian revolution',[9] and it stressed that this liberating act had to be achieved by the working class itself. Because of this, Marx advocated as an urgent first step the foundation of an independent working-class party. His first French disciples were Jules Guesde, who had met him in London where he

had fled after the collapse of the Paris Commune, and Paul Lafargue, who had married one of Marx's daughters, Laura. In 1879, the two men managed to merge a number of small socialist groups into a single party, the *Parti des Travailleurs Socialistes de France.* A year after its formation, Guesde drew up a detailed programme, in cousultation with Marx, known as the *Considérants* programme because its preamble included various paragraphs, each starting with '*Considérant que . . .*'. Among the points to be 'considered', one was that the emancipation of the working class would lead to the emancipation 'of all human beings'; another was that social ownership of the means of production was demanded by 'the very development of capitalist society'; and a third one was the need for the working class to have its own political party. In 1882, a split occurred because a majority, led by Paul Brousse, challenged Guesde's alleged 'dictatorship' and 'rigid Marxism'. Guesde replied by calling his opponents '*possibilistes*' on the ground that they confined themselves to what was 'possible' under the capitalist system, and he and his followers set up an alternative party, the *Parti Ouvrier Français* (POF). The POF's chief activities were the spreading of Marxist education, electoral contests, and taking up workers' struggles for bread-and-butter demands. In this last respect, it was unique among socialist groups, and as a consequence, it was acknowledged as the only genuinely Socialist party by the Labour (or Second) International when the latter was founded in 1889.

However, the development of the industrial working-class movement took place largely outside, if not indeed against all political groups. In 1892 the *Bourses du Travail*, initially set up by the government as mere labour exchanges but eventually functioning as modern British trades councils, formed a national Federation which, three years later, merged with the national federation of trade unions to become France's first trade union centre, the *Confédération Générale du Travail* (CGT). The CGT was predominantly anarcho-syndicalist and regarded all political parties and politicians with contempt. At the other extreme, a number of 'independent Socialists',[10] so called because they rejected the discipline of any group of which they were nominal members, advocated electoral work as the main form of activity. Their programme to this effect, adopted at Saint-Mandé in 1896, was endorsed by the POF in 1897 for the sake of unity. Not content with being parliamentarians first and foremost, some independent Socialists wanted to become ministers as well, and

one of them, Millerand, joined a 'bourgeois government' in 1899, a decision which was in keeping with the 'revisionism' preached by the German Bernstein and other European Socialists. Bernstein wanted to 'revise' Marxism on the ground that a revolution was now obsolete since capitalism was peacefully evolving into socialism. Millerand merely drew the practical conclusion that a Socialist was justified in joining a capitalist government in order to hasten this process.

In 1902, nearly all the French socialist groups lost their separate identity by joining either the militant *Parti Socialiste de France*, led by Guesde, or the more moderate *Parti Socialiste Français*, led by Jaurès. In 1905, in order to comply with the wishes of the Second International, the two parties merged into a single one, from then onwards known by its initials SFIO, which stand for *Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière.* The new party adopted a Unity Charter. On paper, this was a victory for the Guesdist trend because the SFIO was described as 'a party of class struggle and revolution'; in fact, the real victor was Jaurès because, unlike Guesde, he did not simply repeat Marxist propositions in and out of context, but suggested practical answers to the day-to-day problems which arose. Between 1905 and 1914, the SFIO's membership grew from 35,000 to 91,000, and its electoral support from 880,000 to 1,400,000. On the negative side, the party's concern with elections led to its neglect of the trade unions. The CGT retaliated by adopting in 1906 the so-called Amiens Charter which stressed that unions had to work for the abolition of capitalism without bothering about 'parties and sects' which might have the same aim, and by resorting to strikes, sabotage and 'direct action'. As a result, French workers were asked to choose between what Lenin scathingly called the 'parliamentary cretinism' of the SFIO and the insurrectionary tactic of the CGT.

After 1906 and up to 1914, both the SFIO and the CGT moved to the right and became increasingly 'reformist'[11] and 'class collaborationist'. However, a revolutionary minority emerged in both organisations, especially inside the CGT where it was led by Pierre Monatte and those who founded the journal, *La Vie Ouvrière*, in 1909. It provided the PCF with many of its early members. The divorce between the SFIO and the CGT weakened them both. The Socialists came to rely on the urban and rural petty bourgeoisie more than the workers, whereas the CGT failed to unionise more than 9 per cent of the labour force. (In Britain the proportion was 25 per cent and in Germany 28 per cent.) In spite of these weaknesses, there was a

good deal of militancy among the workers (1,250 strikes per year according the government's figures) and in rural areas. Important gains were made, such as the eleven-hour day in 1900, the eight-hour day for miners in 1905; and the introduction of a compulsory rest day in 1906. When the first world war broke out in 1914, French labour was already a powerful force, but it was weakened by two major internal splits, the split between its political and industrial wings, and the split between reformists and revolutionaries.

The second of these splits was destined to become a major factor towards the foundation of the PCF. During the war, it took the form of a clash between support for and opposition to the government's war effort. In theory, such a clash need never have occurred, since all the parties of the Second International had pledged at various international congresses, especially at the 1912 Basle Congress, that they should 'exploit' the crisis ushered in by a world war 'to hasten the downfall of capitalist domination'. In practice, things turned out differently, and with the exception of the Russian Bolsheviks,[12] each major European Socialist party came out in support of its own government and put 'patriotism' before everything else. Whereas German Socialists did make a last-minute attempt to work out a joint policy with their French partners and decided to vote for military credits after prolonged debates,[13] the SFIO immediately responded to Poincaré's appeal for a 'sacred union' (*l'union sacrée*) and in addition to voting for military credits, it delegated two of its members, Guesde and Sembat, to become ministers in a war government of national unity. Although Socialist government participation ceased in September 1917, the party continued to support the war right to the very end.

The fact that the Second International had collapsed at the outbreak of the war and that nearly all its member parties[14] had gone back on their pledge to oppose the war was later used by Lenin to justify the formation of Communist parties everywhere. He claimed that Social-democratic[15] leaders had failed to understand that 'imperialist wars' occurred because of the economic and colonial rivalries among the big capitalist powers and that the aim of 'genuine revolutionaries' was to change the war among *nations* into a struggle among *classes*. This failure, he argued, could not be blamed on individuals, since so many prominent leaders were involved,[16] but was in fact the culmination of a trend which he called 'opportunism' and which amounted to the sacrificing of long-term working-class interests for the sake of

temporary concessions granted by the ruling class. According to him, the social root of opportunism was the existence of a privileged section of the working class, 'the labour aristocracy', to whom the capitalists allowed a few 'crumbs' out of their 'super-profits'. Most of the Social-democratic leaders belonged to the labour aristocracy, he maintained, and were cut off from the rest of the working class both by their way of life and by the outlook such a way of life bred. They had come to reject revolution and to prefer 'class collaboration'.

In France, the *union sacrée* put an end to the SFIO–CGT divorce, and in its stead there arose a clash between an initially powerful pro-war majority and an increasingly significant anti-war minority. At first, the latter was confined to the metal workers' union, led by Alphonse Merrheim, and to the readers and supporters of *La Vie Ouvrière*, led by Pierre Monatte and Alfred Rosmer, but in May 1915, the anti-war feeling spread to the SFIO, some of whose sections took up a pacifist stand, supported by such people as Jean Longuet, a grandson of Karl Marx. It was also in 1915 that two international anti-war conferences took place, one for socialist women organised in Bern by the German, Clara Zetkin, and the other sponsored by Italian Socialists and bringing together 'centrists'[17] and left-wingers in the Swiss village of Zimmerwald. France was represented at Zimmerwald by two trade unionists, Merrheim and Bourderon. The two Frenchmen voted against Lenin's resolution urging 'revolutionary action against the war', which was defeated by nineteen votes to twelve. The Conference issued a Manifesto demanding a 'just peace', but the western press ignored it. In France, a clandestine committee, the *comité zimmerwaldien*, was set up, and in November 1915, it changed its name to *Comité pour la reprise des relations internationales.* In April 1916, another international conference was held at Kienthal, again in Switzerland. It demanded an immediate armistice and instructed Socialists not to vote for military credits. The effect of these events in France was to split the labour movement into three trends, the pro-war right, led by Guesde, Sembat and Renaudel, the pacifist centre, led by Longuet, Paul Faure and Pressemane, and the anti-war left, led by Rosmer, Monatte and Merrheim. This last trend grew considerably as the war went on and as human lives were lost to no apparent gain. In 1916, and still more in 1917, many civilians went on strike to call for an end to the war, and soldiers began to mutiny on a large scale. The appearance in 1916 of Henri Barbusse's *Le Feu*, a disturbingly realistic account of life in the

trenches, further strengthened anti-war feelings. These received a new impetus in March 1917 with the news that the Russian Tsar had been overthrown and that virulent opposition to the war was voiced in the countless workers' and peasants' councils (soviets) that spread throughout the land.

When the October Revolution[18] broke out, people suddenly learned that the Bolshevik government had issued a call for an armistice and for a peace treaty based on 'no annexations and no indemnities'. In addition, although the aims and actions of the Bolshevik revolution were neither understood nor widely known, the setting up of a self-proclaimed working-class and peasant state fired the imagination of many western workers. Unlike their governments which had sent military forces to destroy the new Russian regime, they expressed their solidarity with the soviets and formed 'Hands off Russia' committees. In London, the dockers refused to load the SS *Jolly George* with military equipment against the Soviet Republic, and soon after, the Dunkirk dockers followed suit. Nearly all strikes, mutinies and demonstrations included withdrawal of western forces from Russia among their demands. To these, one must add the revolt of the Black Sea sailors, in which future prominent Communists such as André Marty and Charles Tillon played a big role. In the end, the strength of the protest movement compelled the French government to withdraw its armed forces from Russia, including the war fleet that had been sent to the Black Sea. Other governments had no option but to do the same.

Soon after the October Revolution, seen by the Bolsheviks as the prelude to the world revolution, Lenin and his followers founded the Communist (Third) International. Its aim was to replace the supposedly discredited Second International with a genuinely revolutionary centre, freed from opportunists. This last point, which was to prove a major stumbling block in subsequent negotiations between the SFIO and the Comintern, was seen by Lenin as an issue of principle. There was no point, he argued, in creating a new organisation if it was going to be dominated by the same 'gang' which had let the workers down. They simply had to be removed to allow for the revival of 'genuine' socialism, and consequently, a decisive break with them became one of the fundamental conditions for joining the Third International. The Foundation Congress of the new body was held in Moscow in March 1919, a few weeks after the murder of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht in Germany, and barely a few days

before the start of the short-lived Hungarian revolution.[19] Britain and France were not represented by their as yet non-existent Communist parties but by small left-wing groups. The two most important parties in attendance were the Russian Bolsheviks and the German *Spartakusbund*.[20] The conference took the decision formally to set up the Third International and it called on all militant socialist parties to join its ranks. In France, the old Zimmerwald committee renamed itself *Comité pour l'adhésion à la IIIe Internationale*, and under the leadership of Paul Vaillant-Couturier, Loriot, Rapporport, Souvarine and others, it published a *Bulletin Communiste* advocating affiliation to the Comintern.

The SFIO's reaction to the Comintern appeal went through various stages. At the February 1920 Strasbourg congress, the party was split into three factions, an anti-Comintern right, a pro-Comintern left, and a centre (including Longuet and Léon Blum) which advocated rebuilding the Second International on a new basis and was thus known as the *Reconstructeurs.* After heated debates, the congress decided to leave the Second International by the impressive majority of 4,330 votes to 337, but by an equally impressive majority of 3,031 votes to 1,621, it rejected immediate affiliation to the Comintern but decided to send two of its members, Cachin and Frossard, 'to enter into negotiations with . . . the accredited organs of the Communist International'. Cachin and Frossard arrived in Russia in the middle of June and stayed until the end of July. They had a long talk with Lenin and were struck by his insistence that a break with reformists was essential. Unity with them, he said, was out of the question, because it would be an unprincipled unity; French Socialists simply had to choose between two irreconcilable policies. The French delegates had not expected such uncompromising intransigence. Accustomed as they were to deals and compromises, they were somewhat taken aback. At first, they valiantly tried to defend their party, rightists, centrists and all, but in the end, they were won over both by Lenin's arguments and by what they saw in Russia. Cachin in particular was fired with enthusiasm for the Russian 'Commune'. A practical result of their slowly-changing attitude was that they accepted Lenin's invitation to attend, as observers, the second Comintern congress which opened on the 21st July and whose main purpose was to lay down the conditions for joining the Third International. They left Russia before these conditions, twenty-one in all, were finally drawn up, but they took with them a letter addressed to the SFIO which



included the most important of them.[21] The twenty-one conditions were made public in August and were published by *L'Humanité*, the SFIO daily paper, on 8 October. Here is a summary of them:[22]

1. Genuinely Communist propaganda against the bourgeoisie and reformism.
2. Remove reformists from leading positions.
3. Combine legal and illegal work.
4. Propaganda in the armed forces.
5. Win the support of poor peasants and 'neutralise' the rest of the rural population.
6. Expose 'social patriotism' and 'social pacifism'.[23]
7. Break with reformism and centrism.
8. Support liberation movements in the colonies.
9. Work in mass organisations, eg. trade unions. Form Communist 'fractions'[24] within them.
10. Combat the Amsterdam International and support the international Federation of Red Trade Unions.[25]
11. Bring the parliamentary group under party discipline.
12. Organise the party on the basis of 'democratic centralism'.[26]
13. Periodic purges of petty-bourgeois elements.
14. Support the Soviet Republic.
15. Adopt a new party programme.
16. Accept all Comintern decisions.
17. Adopt the name of Communist Party.
18. Publish Comintern documents in the party press.
19. Convene an extraordinary congress to endorse the above points.
20. Ensure that leading party bodies include at least a two-thirds majority of people who supported Comintern affiliation before the second congress.
21. Expel those who reject the above conditions.

The most important features of these twenty-one conditions are, first, their stringency, intended to deter waverers and 'unreliable elements', secondly, their endorsement of Lenin's political views (revolution, dictatorship of the proletariat, anti-imperialism and anti-reformism), and finally, the stress on the need for discipline in Communist ranks. The highly centralised character of the new International was meant as a reaction against the contempt for international decisions which had characterised the Second International. It is fair to add, however, that the Comintern leaders also recognised the need for flexibility: for example Article sixteen pledged that the CI Executive would take into account 'the great diversity of conditions' facing individual parties and would issue general directives 'only when that [was] possible'. As for the unmistakably 'Russian' character of the Comintern, it was defended on the ground that Russia had so far been



the only country to have made a successful revolution and could thus serve as an example to others. But whereas Lenin had expressed the hope that other countries would soon follow and be able to take the lead, his successor, Stalin, eventually presented his country as a model, a concept which did great harm to the Communist movement, and to the PCF in particular, at least until the 1960s. In 1920, however, the mood of many SFIO rank-and-file members and of some leaders was that the new International offered the French Socialist party a road which could lead to success since it had obviously worked in Russia. In view of this, it did not come as a great surprise that the SFIO congress held at Tours in December 1920 voted in favour of affiliation to the Comintern.

However, the historic Tours congress, which we shall presently examine, cannot be explained solely in terms of the October Revolution and the foundation of the Comintern, for it was as much, if not more, a response to the evolution of French society and the French labour movement between 1914 and 1920. The changes which occurred in France during and after the war were so deep that some critics speak of a 'second industrial revolution'.[27] This is somewhat excessive, because the new situation presented many contradictory features. In particular, although the state intervened in the economy on an unprecedented scale, largely to ensure adequate supplies of armaments, the actual control of production remained in private hands throughout; although in answer to wartime needs, metallurgy and aeronautics grew to employ over a million workers, in 1921 an equal number could still be found in the older-established textile industry;[28] although mass production led to greater working-class concentration (e.g. at Renault-Billancourt, the labour force increased from 5,000 in 1914 to 25,000 in 1918),[28] small and medium firms were still important, and so were the middle strata and their influential party, the so-called 'Radical-Socialist' party; although the CGT increasingly became a social partner of the employers, countless strikes took place outside its ranks to protest against inflation, rising prices and the worsening of living standards; although the SFIO leadership was mostly reformist, many of its rank-and-file members were revolutionary. One cannot agree with Annie Kriegel that the split in the French labour movement became a thing of the past as the war ended, for as the sociological analyses of the PCF historian, Jean-Louis Robert, reveal, in 1918–20, ' . . . the areas or regions on which the revolutionary minority [was] based . . . [were] those in which [there had been]



strong trade union activity and struggles during the war, whereas the majority rather [tended] to be based on those areas or regions where such activity and struggles [had been] weak'.[29]

Before 1916, working-class militancy was rather limited, but 'war weariness increased the willingness to strike',[30] and the last two years of the war were years of great social unrest. The same can be said of the years following the armistice which witnessed a 'radicalisation of the working class'.[31] This was due to political reasons (the government's harsh repression of the pacifist opposition and its military intervention against Soviet Russia) and to socio-economic reasons (labour mobility, quick demobilisation, and growth of trade union membership).[32] The winning of the eight-hour day in 1919 further increased militancy, of which the most important manifestation was the 1920 railwaymen's strike, which ended in utter failure because the CGT, in the face of stiff governmental repression, ordered a return to work without having secured any concessions. Militant French workers, who had been stunned the year before by the right-wing landslide at the General Election (in which the SFIO had lost 32 seats in spite of having gained 400,000 votes), began to lose faith in the traditional forms of action hitherto known to them. Since neither strikes nor elections seemed to lead anywhere, the way lay open for a third road. It was the road suggested by the Comintern and it was that road which the Tours Congress decided to take.

The Foundation Congress (Tours, December 1920)

The Tours Congress, which began as the 18th congress of the SFIO and ended as the Foundation Congress of the PCF, opened on Christmas Day 1920. A successful resolution, moved right at the start, ensured that affiliation to the Comintern would be discussed before anything else. Actually, the decision to affiliate was a foregone conclusion since a majority of districts and areas had already mandated their delegates to vote for it. What was at stake was whether all the CI's terms would be accepted and whether there would be a split. The three main trends at the congress were the pro-Comintern left, based on the existing pro-affiliation committee; an anti-Comintern right, made up of 'defencists' (supporters of national defence) and *Résistants* (because they resisted affiliation), the latter led by Blum; and a centre (the majority) which was itself split into late converts to affiliation (such as Cachin and Frossard) and *Reconstructeurs* (such as Longuet) who voiced so many reservations about joining the Comin-



tern that in effect they took an anti-affiliation stand. The big question mark was whether the centre left would be able to persuade the centre right to remain in the party after the expected majority vote in favour of affiliation. On this crucial issue people like Frossard were unhappy about the CI's insistence that there was no room for Longuet and his friends in a genuinely revolutionary party.

The debate on affiliation took up five days.[33] The main speech in favour was made by Cachin and the main speech against by Blum. Theirs was the most thorough examination of all the issues involved, and Blum in particular, went out of his way to bring to light what, in his view, 'radically differentiates French Socialism from Bolshevism'.[34] Although it was the Russian Revolution which had sharply exposed the differences between revolutionaries and reformists, it was not in their declared attitude towards Soviet Russia that the two sides chiefly differed, since both of them, and the whole congress for that matter, came out in support of the new republic. If the resolution tabled by Blum himself (withdrawn at the last minute for obvious lack of support), did not mention Russia, the two main resolutions before Congress, that of Cachin and Frossard for affiliation, on the one hand, and that of the *Reconstructeurs*, Longuet and Faure, on the other, spoke of the defence of Soviet Russia against all 'bourgeois governments' as the workers' 'most pressing task' and stressed the universal significance of the October Revolution. In his speech, Cachin linked the issue of affiliation to the existence of the Soviet Republic, adding that the new state called upon all Socialists 'to come and struggle alongside it on the new front of the International it (had) created'. Although he denied that he and Frossard has been 'mystified by the Russian revolutionaries', he defended all of their most contentious policies. For example, he referred to the fact that they had distributed the land among the peasants instead of collectivising it and asserted that they had realistically responded to the yearnings for land ownership among poor and middle peasants; the advantages of common ownership would gradually be brought to them, he added. (Shades of the forced collectivisation of the 1920s!) More importantly, he described the Bolsheviks' foreign policy as a policy of peace, adding, amidst thunderous applause, that 'the only people who are today pursuing a policy of conflict and war are not the Bolsheviks, but our French militarists'.

The main issues on which Cachin and Blum differed were the party, the dictatorship of the proletariat, violent revolution and national

defence. On the first one, Cachin claimed that in conditions of foreign and civil war, only a disciplined party could have ensured victory, and that the success of the revolution in France demanded the same kind of discipline. He stressed that no one should be free from party control, least of all the parliamentary group, as had become common in the SFIO. Substantially, the organisational principles he defended are still those of the present PCF, but for many years, they were applied with great rigidity although the exceptional situation described by Cachin to justify them had been succeeded by a different one which was no longer, according to the Communists' own analysis, characterised by the prospects of an imminent revolution, demanding the strict discipline which may have been necessary in 1920. As for Blum, he bluntly said that he preferred a broad organisation in which everyone was free to voice his own ideas to the rigidly centralised Leninist party, thus reiterating the Menshevik case against the Bolsheviks. The issue of whether the party should allow 'factions' still divides French Socialists from Communists, the latter continuing to believe with Lenin that a revolutionary party ceases to be effective if all members, after democratic discussion, do not apply majority decisions. When Blum went on to charge Lenin with having created an elitist party which relied on the 'instincts' and 'sheep-like violence of inorganic masses', he probably allowed his emotions to get the better of his judgement. For in all fairness, although Lenin certainly believed in 'the masses', he also thought they had to be politically educated before they could be set in motion. One may disagree – on tactical, moral or any other grounds – with the Leninist policy (which is more than ever that of the present PCF) of always stirring the masses to action, but it is not very fair to equate it with an appeal to 'instinct' and 'passion'. Moreover, unlike Blanqui, Lenin did not believe that a small number of activists should stage a coup on the assumption that the 'sheep-like' masses would be sure to follow. In fact, in his famous April Theses, he said that before the revolution could take place, the Bolsheviks had to win over the majority by means of 'patient explanation', and he repeatedly made the same point when advising foreign Communists on their tactics.

On the dictatorship of the proletariat, Cachin defended the one-party system which existed in Russia by saying that all anti-Soviet oppositionists had joined the *armed* counter-revolutionaries. That was historically accurate, but what Cachin could not foresee in 1920 was that Stalin later transformed a temporary necessity into a sacred

principle of Communist orthodoxy and that until 1960 or so the PCF dutifully echoed him. Blum, for his part, assured Congress that he was personally in favour of the dictatorship of the proletariat, but he added that it should be operated by his kind of party if it were not to become dictatorship pure and simple. What gave a good deal of credibility to Blum's assertion was that Lenin and his supporters probably under-estimated the great differences between the democratic west and autocratic Russia. As for the argument that the history of Stalinism later confirmed Blum's fears, it raises the issue of the extent to which Stalinism was the inevitable outcome of Leninism. Modern Communists hotly deny that this was the case, whereas their critics take the opposite view. The former point to Lenin's fight against bureaucracy and to his condemnation of Stalin's authoritarianism. The latter reply that, irrespective of Lenin's intentions, the one-party system is bound to be dictatorial. The controversy is still raging today.

The third bone of contention was violent revolution. According to Cachin, it was 'the savagery of the ruling classes' which had forced the Russians to use violent means, but in 'this era of barbarism', the Bolsheviks alone were displaying 'feelings of kindness and humanity'. He added that heeding the lessons of history on this issue went back to Guesde, who had written that in all revolutions, 'the gun had completed the work of the ballot-box', and to Engels, who had described force as the instrument through which social forces shatter 'the dead, fossilised political forms'. Blum, on the other hand, argued that the 'putschist' conception of the revolution might apply to backward Russia, but not to France. He further asserted that the Bolsheviks regarded the conquest of political power as an end in itself, whereas western Socialists regarded it as a means, the fundamental aim being 'the social transformation'. In one respect, this aspect of the debate is somewhat dated, largely because modern Communists in the west now bank on the possibility of a non-violent revolution, but the relationship between the political and social sides of the revolution is still topical. To the complaint, first expressed by Blum and later taken up by his successors, that Leninists put the seizure of political power before the need to change society, French Communists have generally replied that one is impossible without the other. Although this remains what the PCF thinks today, greater emphasis is now put on the people's self-activity, '*l'autogestion*', and less on state measures.

Finally, Cachin and Blum clashed over national defence. Cachin claimed that the slogan of 'national defence' was used by the



bourgeoisie to make French workers support a war on Soviet Russia, and according to the record, the whole congress applauded such sentiments. But Blum was right when he later complained that Cachin had failed to discuss whether circumstances might ever arise when Socialists had to support a 'bourgeois government' which is waging a purely defensive war. Cachin's possible excuse that at the time this was purely hypothetical would not be wholly satisfactory, and it is interesting to note that other pro-affiliation speakers, such as Frossard and Rappoport, were less reticent and attacked national defence under capitalism as 'sheer deception'. However, Blum's assertion that Socialists should face the need to support national defence, even under capitalism, was greeted by many delegates' angry shouts. In vain did the speaker try to appeal for calm, in vain did he say that while the majority would go and seek 'adventures' he and his friends would stay behind to guard 'the old firm', most of his listeners voiced their hostility, and when he shouted before he sat down, 'Does anyone here think I am not a socialist?', he got a rude reply from Cartier, 'You're a confusionist.'

The other important speeches at the congress were those of Frossard, the party secretary, and Longuet, as both were mostly concerned with the sensitive issue of the expulsion of reformists demanded by the Comintern. Frossard spoke on the 28th in the afternoon, but that morning, Congress had received a telegram from the CI, the notorious 'Zinoviev telegram',[35] which described Longuet, Faure and their group as 'determined agents of the bourgeois influence over the proletariat'. Frossard ignored the challenge and said that 'the resolution we ask you to vote for does not involve any expulsion', and he emphasised, 'No expulsion whatever'. (The next day, he went further and openly stated, 'No, I do not agree with Zinoviev. As far as I am concerned, you are not agents of bourgeois influence.') Then, he made an impassioned appeal to the centre right: 'You have no right to leave us, you cannot, you must not. We need you as you need us.' Frossard also expressed disagreement with the Comintern over party work in the unions, claiming that it contradicted the latter's independence,[36] and over too rigid a conception of democratic centralism, asserting that the party should draw up a 'Minorities' Charter'. Longuet spoke immediately after Frossard and rejected the 'Zinoviev telegram' as an insult coming from an International which 'is not an International of the proletariat of all countries, but a specifically Russian International'. After asserting that he wanted

unity 'with fury', he warned that he could not remain in a party which accepted the Comintern's outrageous terms.

An incident which is worth mentioning is that half-way through Frossard's speech, Clara Zetkin made an unexpected appearance. The French government had refused her a visa to enter France and no one knew how she had managed to come to Tours, but her presence as well as her impassioned appeal to join the Comintern had an electric effect on the delegates. Her speech did not add anything new to the debate, but it contributed to raising the already high temperature of the congress. One should also mention two other significant interventions, that of the Indo-China delegate, the future Ho Chi Minh, who said that by joining the Comintern the party would at last give colonial questions 'the importance they deserve'; and that of Paul Vaillant-Couturier, who asserted that 'formal unity' would be a 'caricature' of the unity wanted by Jaurès because it would hide the fact that the party included 'people who can no longer work together'.

On 29 December 1920, late at night, the vote was taken. The pro-affiliation resolution of Cachin and Frossard got 3,208 block votes, whereas the anti-affiliation resolution of Longuet and Faure received 1,022. There were 397 abstentions, 44 votes for a pro-affiliation amendment and 60 for an anti-affiliation amendment. Thus, Comintern supporters got 68.7 per cent, its opponents 22.9 per cent, and abstentionists 8.4 per cent. However, it was not all plain sailing yet. A final attempt was made by the *Reconstructeurs* to cut their losses. They demanded a vote on a resolution, moved by Mistral, calling upon Congress to refuse the expulsions demanded by the Comintern, warning that they would leave if it was not passed. The left moved a contrary resolution pledging that no one would be expelled for past errors, provided he accepted 'the decision of the present congress'. The left motion received 3,247 votes, the Mistral resolution only 1,398, and there were 143 abstentions. This time, it was all over. It was 3 a.m. The defeated minority left the hall. The next day, Congress elected a Management Committee of twenty-four people and issued a Manifesto. The French Communist Party was born, but it was only in May 1921 that it described itself as the *Section française de l'Internationale Communiste*, SFIC.[37] The new party managed to keep 110,000 members (as against 30,000 for the SFIO) as well as the party paper, *L'Humanité*, but fifty-five deputies out of sixty-eight chose to remain in 'the old firm'.

Much of what has been written on the Tours Congress (and on the



PCF) is marred by political passion, but two scholarly studies stand out. The first one, Annie Kriegel's *Aux origines du communisme français*, asserts that the 1920 split was a 'banal accident, such as had happened before in the already long history of the labour movement',[38] but that it acquired a decisive significance because of the Russian Bolsheviks' direct intervention. She adds that nearly all French Socialists had the haziest notions about the true nature of Bolshevism; if many of them supported affiliation to the CI, it was because they yearned for a change, and unwittingly, they agreed to what the author calls 'an artificial graft'. She finally believes that because French Communists linked their fortunes to those of Soviet Russia whereas the Socialists refused to do so, the breach opened at Tours became permanent. Annie Kriegel is right to stress the importance of the Bolsheviks' intervention, but she does not sufficiently show that it stemmed from their belief that European revolutions were imminent, so that the role of outsiders was not so much to perform an 'artificial graft' but to provide assistance to local revolutionaries. Secondly, one may again agree with her that the majority of French Socialists did not really understand Bolshevism (which explains why so many of them eventually left or were expelled), but it does not alter the fact that the emergence of Bolshevism, whether fully understood or not, re-opened the debate between reformists and revolutionaries, a debate which, as already suggested, was by no means over in 1918. Finally, it is not quite right to say that the Russian Revolution gave birth to world communism, because it was rather a long-standing revolutionary tradition as well as the maturing of revolutionary consciousness brought about by the 1914–18 war which gave birth to the Russian Revolution *and* the many Communist parties which were created all over the world.

The second study, Robert Wohl's *French Communism in the making*, sees the emergence of the PCF (and of the Russian Communist party as well) as having been due to 'the crisis of liberal values that affected all of Europe in the years preceding the World War',[39] an assessment, incidentally, with which a Marxist might agree, provided the word 'liberal' were replaced by 'capitalist'.[40] Wohl does not think that the birth of the PCF was either an 'accident' or a 'mistake'. He writes: 'Men sometimes make mistakes in the heat of action . . . But a political movement that has lasted half a century must have a deeper basis.'[41]

Notes

1 E. Hobsbawm, *Revolutionaries* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973), p. 3.

2 Saint-Simon and Fourier relied on utopian schemes to change society rather than on political action. Proudhon also shunned political action as he was an anarchist. Blanqui believed in '*les minorités agissantes*', i.e. in small groups of activists plotting a revolution. Jaurès stressed the moral aspect of socialism more than its economic aspect. Guesde called himself a Marxist, but interpreted Marxism as forecasting the inevitable collapse of capitalism under the strain of its own contradictions.

3 The PCF admires the 'common-sense' proposals of Saint-Simon and Fourier but rejects their 'utopianism'. It rejects Proudhon's anarchism as a 'petty-bourgeois' ideology. It respects Blanqui's revolutionary enthusiasm but rejects his elitist conceptions. It claims to continue both Jaurès and Guesde whilst criticising the 'idealism' of the former and the 'mechanistic fatalism' of the latter.

4 The 1830 revolution replaced the Bourbon monarchy with a 'bourgeois king', Louis-Philippe. The 1848 revolution abolished the monarchy altogether, but the republic it set up was destroyed by Napoleon III in 1851.

5 The Paris Commune was set up by Parisian workers to prevent their city from falling into Prussian hands. It was praised by Marx and Lenin for having abolished 'parliamentarism' and the standing army and for paying all officials the same wage as skilled workers. The Commune was put down by Thiers after 2½ months' existence. Many of the participants were savagely executed, whilst others fled.

6 Trade unions were first legalised in 1864, then outlawed in 1871, and finally legalised again in 1884. In Britain the 1799 Anti-Combination laws were repealed in 1824–5.

7 Anarcho-syndicalism is the trend which advocates spontaneity rather than organisation and industrial action rather than political action.

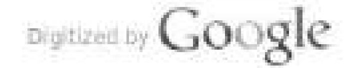
8 According to Marx, classes arose when higher productivity enabled the production of a surplus which was appropriated by a small minority. Since then, 'the history of all hitherto existing society has been a history of class struggles' (*Communist Manifesto*), but modern productivity makes class divisions obsolete.

9 For Marxists, a revolution is a change in property relations and 'a transfer of power from one class to another class' (Lenin). The proletarian revolution is meant to replace private ownership of the means of production with common ownership and thus leads to the abolition of all classes.

10 The most important 'independent Socialists' were Viviani, Briand, Millerand and Jaurès. The first three eventually ceased to be socialists and became leading bourgeois statesmen.

11 As already pointed out, 'reformism' describes the view that capitalism can be patched up by reforms jointly implemented by the capitalists and the working class. It is thus inseparable from 'class collaboration'.

12 The Russian Socialist party was split into Bolsheviks and Mensheviks



(which mean majority and minority in Russian) since 1903. In 1912 they became separate parties.

13 For further details, cf. James Joll, *The Second International* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), especially pp. 173 *et passim.*

14 For example, the British Labour Party also supported the war effort, though some of its leaders (Henderson, Snowden, Ramsay MacDonald) eventually advocated an early peace, without however fighting against the war.

15 'Social-democrat' was the name taken by many parties of the Second International. For Communists it soon became a term of abuse, synonymous with betrayal of the working class.

16 In addition to Guesde, other prominent leaders included the Russian Plekhanov, and the German Kautsky. The latter was never a complete supporter of the war, but as he mostly believed in putting 'pressure' on the government to end the war without advocating revolutionary action, he was branded by Lenin as a traitor.

17 Centrists were those who took up a position similar to Kautsky's and the aforementioned Labour leaders.

18 Although the Bolshevik Revolution occurred in November 1917, it took place in October according to the old Russian calendar and is thus known as the October Revolution.

19 The Hungarian revolution started on 21 March and ended on 1 August. Two other short-lived revolutions occurred, one in Bavaria (13 April to 1 May) and another in Slovakia (16 June to 5 July).

20 Initially the German delegate argued against the immediate creation of a new International, echoing Rosa Luxemburg's fear that Russian influence might be too great, but eventually his party agreed to join the CI.

21 The twenty-one conditions merely spelt out in greater detail the points made in the letter to the SFIO, so that there was little ground for the charge that Cachin and Frossard had been 'fooled'.

22 The full text is available in *Le Congrès de Tours* (Editions Sociales, 1980), p. 119.

23 'Social-pacifism' and 'social-patriotism' are Communist terms to describe scathingly the brand of pacifism and patriotism preached by Social-democrats.

24 One must distinguish between 'fractions', which describe Communist groups in a broad organisation, and 'factions', which describe organised trends within the CP and are said to be incompatible with party unity.

25 The Amsterdam International of trade unions had just been set up by reformists. The federation of red trade unions, eventually known as RILU (Red International Labour Unions) was in the process of being formed.

26 'Democratic centralism' is to this day the basic organisational principle of a CP. Its declared aim is to combine the membership's participation in a decision-making (democracy) with centralised leadership and discipline binding on all (centralism).

27 David Thomson, quoted by R. Wohl, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

28 These figures, as well as other significant ones, are given by J. L. Robert



in *Les origines du PCF*, chapter 1 of *Le PCF, Etapes et Problèmes*, (Editions Sociales, 1981), pp. 21–2.
29 J. L. Robert, *ibid.*, p. 28.
30 R. Wohl, *op. cit.*, p. 87.
31 *Ibid*, p. 117.
32 For example, the total membership of the CGT went up from 650,000 before the war to 2 million in 1920. The most spectacular increase occurred in the metal workers' union (from 7,500 in 1912 to over 200,000 in 1918) and in the railwaymen's union (from 30,000 to over 300,000).
33 For a full account of the debate and of the congress, cf. *Le Congrès de Tours.*
34 A. Kriegel, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 796.
35 This was a misnomer because it had been sent by the Comintern executive as a whole. Zinoviev, as secretary, had simply been the first signatory.
36 In fairness to the CI, one should note that it did not demand control of the unions by the party, as implied by Frossard, but the setting up of 'Communist cells' in the unions. It was these propaganda groups which had to be 'completely subordinated to the party'.
37 Despite the adoption of the initials SFIC, the name of *Parti Socialiste* was kept until January 1922. The initials SFIC were naturally dropped after the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943.
38 A. Kriegel, *op. cit.*, p. 871.
39 R. Wohl, *op. cit.*, p. 448.
40 A Marxist would naturally add that the crisis of capitalist values is caused by the crisis of capitalism itself.
41 R. Wohl, *op. cit.*, p. 448.



CHAPTER 2

Apprenticeship (1921–33)

'A party of a new type'?

It was one thing to affiliate to the Comintern and quite another to become 'a party of a new type' in the Leninist sense. The PCF's first thirteen years were 'a period of apprenticeship in the application of Leninist-style strategy and tactics'.[1] According to Lenin, Communist parties had to be of 'a new type' to distinguish themselves from Social-democrats and to meet the new situation caused by 'the general crisis of capitalism'. The novelty had to be expressed theoretically (uncompromising acceptance of Marxism), politically (commitment to revolution, to the dictatorship of the proletariat, to anti-imperialism and internationalism), socially (predominantly working-class membership and ability to lead the masses), organisationally (acceptance of democratic centralism and basing the party on 'cells', which Lenin viewed as centres of political education and day-to-day practical activity), and morally (dedication to communism as distinct from careerism). The party formed at Tours hardly met most of these requirements. On the positive side, it started with a good deal of support from revolutionary workers, mostly those in the 'dynamic' industries such as metallurgy; it had a daily paper, *L'Humanité*; it enjoyed some prestige among a significant number of France's intellectuals; it had sprung from within a mass party, the SFIO, and was not a poor relation in the labour movement; finally, it was part of a wider international movement which included a party in power, the Bolsheviks, and 'charismatic' leaders such as Lenin and Trotsky.

On the debit side, the list was more impressive. First, there was no ideological unity, and knowledge of basic Marxism was lacking. To remedy this situation, regular party schools were started in 1924, and a theoretical journal was founded, the *Cahiers du Bolchévisme*, re-named *Cahiers du Communisme* in 1944. Secondly, the political views of a great many PCF foundation members were anarcho-syndicalist rather than Leninist. They admired Soviet Russia more for the existence of popular soviets than for its use of state power to crush



counter-revolutionaries and to build socialism. They believed in the *Grand Soir* (the great social upheaval) rather than in patient political work. Thirdly, the PCF's major weakness was that until 1933–4 it had insufficient ties with the working class and displayed a patent 'inability to become an organisation capable of manipulating masses'.[2] Many militant trade unionists were outside its ranks, which led Lenin to declare bluntly in 1922 that 'there is no French Communist Party'. He urged two prominent trade unionists, Monmousseau and Sémard, to join the PCF in order to change it from within. Both he and Zinoviev, the CI leader at the time, stressed the need for massive working-class recruitment. In 1923 Monmousseau joined the PCF; in 1924 the railwayman, Sémard, became party secretary; and in 1925 Thorez, who came from a mining family,[3] was made Organisation Secretary. In spite of this, by 1932 the PCF membership had dwindled to 30,000 (having already gone down from 110,000 in 1921 to 60,000 in 1924), whereas the SFIO's had gone up to 138,000 (having already increased from 35,000 in 1921 to 111,000 in 1925). To complicate matters, the party was unable to play any role in the CGT until 1936, because the CGT expelled all its 'Red' militants in 1921, and the latter were forced to set up their own rival centre, the *Confédération Générale du Travail Unitaire*, CGTU, in 1922. (The two were re-united in 1936.) The worst feature was that the PCF's vitriolic attacks on the SFIO between 1926 and 1934, including the ludicrous charge that Socialists were 'social-fascists', considerably reduced Communist credibility among the workers who had kept faith with social-democracy. Fourthly, the PCF's reorganisation on Leninist lines was slow, and at first, 'the new party retained many of the features and habits of the old one'.[4] Apart from the difficulty of transforming 'a basically Jauressian party'[5] into a 'party of a new type', personal rivalries among the leaders and bureaucratic tendencies did not help matters. Finally, one cannot say that before 1934 the majority of PCF members were genuine Communists. To a lot of them, communism was not a new way of life, but a doctrine which crystallised their grumbles and frustrations, and in some cases, a way of making a political career.

To all these negative features, for which the PCF was either wholly or largely responsible, one must add the government's persecution of Communists, a circumstance which was naturally not of the PCF's own choosing but which greatly added to its difficulties, since it turned it into a semi-legal organisation in the late 1920s. In 1927 the

minister, Sarraut, launched a full-scale anti-communist attack, under the slogan of '*Le communisme, voilà l'ennemi*', which led to numerous arrests, fines, and the seizing of the party's daily paper. A number of Communist deputies were charged with subversion and had their parliamentary immunity lifted. In his Memoirs Duclos recalls that he had to play hide and seek with the police in order to escape arrest, but when he was caught, he was sentenced to no less than thirty years' imprisonment. Luckily for him, a few months later, the Chamber approved the release of all imprisoned deputies by 265 votes to 220. However, this only applied to the period when Parliament was in session, so that in 1928, just before the dissolution of the Chamber prior to the General Election, he had to leave the House under cover of darkness. The same applied to other PCF deputies. As for ordinary Communist militants they fared even worse, since for them there was no question of being covered by parliamentary immunity, however precarious the latter might be. On 25 December 1929, *L'Humanité* reported as many as 1,127 cases of prosecution against Communists, adding that 597 party members had been sentenced to a total of 260 years' imprisonment and over one million francs in fines.

However, one should not magnify the PCF's early weaknesses out of all proportion and imagine that in its apprenticeship period all that the party managed to do was to become an impotent little sect. For it was that apparently insignificant sect which, in 1934, took a major political initiative, the launching of the Popular Front, and from then onwards became one of France's major political parties. We shall examine the 1934 turning-point in the next chapter, but at this stage, it is important to note what the PCF did learn during its formative years. First, it learned to survive, which was no mean achievement since it was hounded by the government, as we have just seen, and openly attacked by the SFIO and the CGT. (The 'reformists' did occasionally condemn the government's 'excesses' in fighting communism, but they claimed at the same time that it was the PCF's behaviour which had brought about the repression in the first place.) The survival was not only physical, as it were, but political: although neither its leaders nor its political mentor, the Comintern, fully understood the post-war economic recovery, blandly described in Communist documents as the period of 'stabilisation of capitalism', or the socio-economic roots of social-democracy, or the real importance and mood of the middle strata (still constituting the majority of the population and more terrified than ever by the prospect of losing their

previous savings under a controlled economy), it did adapt itself to a non-revolutionary situation by trying to fight on all fronts – especially at the workplace, where it set up factory cells, and in the field of foreign policy, where it attacked the government's 'imperialist' plans. Admittedly, it was not able to become a 'mass party', but to some appreciable extent, it did reach the masses: for example, it was active in broad bodies such as the ARAC (*Association Républicaine des Anciens Combattants*), the ex-servicemen's organisation founded by Barbusse, and in the not unimportant CGTU; and its daily paper was widely read: in 1929, despite a party membership of 38,000, the readership of *L'Humanité* was in the region of 200,000. Finally, the PCF managed to give itself new leaders, fully dedicated to communism. One of them, Maurice Thorez, became General Secretary[6] in 1930 and his role in transforming the PCF into a mature political organisation is admitted by all observers. His success is sometimes ascribed to the fact that he was 'above all the man of the apparatus',[7] sometimes to his intellectual and political qualities.[8] His most hostile biographer, Philippe Robrieux,[9] does not deny these qualities, but claims that Thorez became a tool of the CI's delegate in France, Eugene Fried, known to all as 'Clément'. On the other hand, the account of the two men's relationship given by Ceretti[10] suggests that it was rather a case of genuine partnership.

Comintern guidance: internal life and United Front

Let us now examine the PCF's early years in greater detail. The first crucial issue the new party had to face was the nature of its relationship with the Comintern. On this, it was deeply divided, as there were at least three conflicting trends – a pro-Comintern vocal minority (Souvarine, Treint, Vaillant-Couturier), an anti-Comintern equally vocal small group, and as usual, a majority of centrists (led by Cachin and Frossard) wavering between a centre-left and a centre-right but all resenting the International's 'excessive interference', as they saw it, in the French party's affairs. The International itself tried at first not to intervene too much and too heavily, but it soon felt it had to 'purge [the PCF] of its reformist remnant'.[11] Both sides treated the issue as one of principle, the PCF majority in the name of 'independence' and the CI leadership in the name of 'realism'. The former genuinely thought they had little to learn from others. They felt that having enthusiastically joined a new International, mostly as a protest against the old one, they had to be left alone to interpret communism



in their own way. It is tempting to sympathise with them and to feel that they were saying in the 1920s what the PCF is saying today. But in fairness, the difference in situations must be taken into account and the other side must be heard. Lenin and the Comintern felt, first, that the French CP was not mature enough as yet to stand on its own feet and that it needed the guidance of more experienced Communists, not all of them Russians; and secondly, that a European revolution was imminent and would be likely to occur simultaneously in a number of countries, so that it was important to co-ordinate the activities of all revolutionaries. That history later disproved Lenin's assessment of Europe's revolutionary potential does not necessarily invalidate his point. Moreover, when the rebels shouted against 'Moscow', he told them they were substituting geography for politics. Of course, he argued, the Comintern's headquarters were in Moscow, but where else could they have been at the time? The whole point, he maintained, was that the men who directed the Comintern from Moscow, whether Russian or non-Russian, were not motivated by the interests of a particular country but by those of the world revolution. The tactics they were keen to get adopted were designed to hasten the revolution, not to provide bases for a foreign power in other countries. After Lenin's death, his successors adopted the policy of building 'socialism in one country', but even they did not assert that foreign Communists had to become agents of the Soviet state. They rather presented the task of defending the Soviet Union as part and parcel of the global strategy of strengthening the revolutionary movement. Whatever we may think of Stalin's real intentions, it was because he described his country as 'the base of the world revolution' that he was able to enlist the support of Communists abroad. We are dealing here with a highly controversial issue, and as Robert Wohl remarks, 'No question has been more hotly debated within the European Socialist movement. . . . The debate has shown no tendency to die out with the passage of time . . .'.[12] It is neither possible nor desirable to pronounce a final verdict at this stage, especially as an account of the various stages of the PCF's history should enable readers to decide for themselves. As far as the 1921–33 period is concerned, it reveals that initially, following Lenin's advice, both Zinoviev and Stalin (yes, Stalin . . .) tried to avoid excessive centralisation and interference from Moscow. It is perhaps tragically amusing to note that in 1926 Stalin told the sixth CI Plenum that one could not settle political problems by making heads roll! As for Zinoviev, and his successor at

the head of the CI, Bukharin, they repeatedly urged national parties to display initiative and they encouraged collective discussions. A drastic change occurred in 1929, however, when the CI leadership tended to stifle all opposition and when the CPSU's role became unchallengeable. Until 1934, bureaucratic methods and political sectarianism went hand in hand.

The protracted battle between the PCF and the CI began in July 1921, when Trotsky, then in charge of French affairs, and later the ECCI as a whole, issued a number of criticisms. These were mostly organisational, but very soon the issue of the United Front (discussed below) added fuel to the fire. The PCF's chief mistakes were said to be poor communication with the CI, lack of political leadership given by the Management Committee, poor internal life, and latitude given to individuals to publish their own newspapers outside party control. (A case in point was Henri Fabre's *Journal du Peuple* which openly preached 'free expression' within the party and rejection of CI 'interference'.) Above all, the ECCI demanded increased working-class representation and influence. When the first PCF congress met in December 1921, it spent nearly all its time discussing the CI's criticisms, but it reached no definite conclusions apart from not re-electing Souvarine, the party's delegate at the Comintern, to the Management Committee. It was a snub for the CI, and as a result, some of its supporters, Loriot, Treint, Dunois and Vaillant-Couturier, resigned from the MC. A split of the magnitude of the Tours split seemed imminent. It was averted thanks to the Comintern's intervention: the ECCI Plenum met in February 1922 and got the French delegates to pledge that they would put an end to internecine strife and would expel Fabre. Two months later, Fabre was still in the party, and the CI grew impatient. Its delegate in France, the Swiss ex-clergyman Humbert-Droz, did his best to bring about a compromise between the left and the centre, but he failed, for the centre chose to wage a war of attrition.

A few days before the second PCF congress was due to open in October, the CI sent Manuilsky to France, and he proposed, as an unprecedented compromise, that despite the fact that a CP does not allow 'factions', the left and the centre should have equal representation on leading party bodies. Both sides raised countless objections, and Manuilsky was told by Frossard that the matter would have to be settled by Congress. Manuilsky accepted the challenge and addressed the meeting, although he had entered France illegally and could be

arrested if discovered. He did not mince his words and told delegates that their party was 'sick' because it had wasted time on trivialities. Two foreign delegates echoed him, the German Franz Dalhem, who said that revolutionaries needed discipline, and the Englishman Tom Bell, who bluntly told his listeners (in English!) that there was only one Communist party and that was in Moscow. On the last day of the congress, the centre narrowly defeated the left by 1,698 votes to 1,516, and assumed sole leadership of the party, which led to left-wingers resigning from the MC. The new Management Committee frankly admitted that the crisis had not been resolved. In November 1922 the 4th Comintern congress opened. On 1 December it adopted a resolution which included, among other things, Manuilsky's earlier proposal for equal representation of left and centre. Although Cachin agreed to abide by the decision, Frossard refused. On 1 January 1923, he resigned from the party. Other rebels were expelled. This time, the first round was well and truly over, and the International had won. Its victory was greeted by *L'Humanité* (8 January 1923) as the timely 'bursting of an abscess' and as the welcome disappearance of people who had 'wanted to make use of the party, not to be of use to it'.

Between 1923 and 1929, despite the closer co-ordination between the PCF and the CI, clashes were not infrequent. For example, in December 1926, at the 7th ECCI Plenum, Bukharin clashed with Sémard over his criticism that the PCF was guilty of 'opportunism', and later, had to tone down his remarks. In January 1927, an article by Humbert-Droz in the Comintern journal charging the PCF with poor theoretical work prompted Thorez to issue a strong protest. The French leader further complained that leading members of the CI (Bukharin, Togliatti, then known as Ercoli, and Humbert-Droz) were exploiting divisions among PCF leaders. After 1929, it became difficult for individual CPs to challenge the CI's authority as well as Stalin's undisputed leadership. The PCF accepted, not without internal debates among its leaders, nearly all the sectarian policies imposed on it, especially the attacks on the SFIO. It was also because of the Comintern's blindness that the threat of fascism was initially under-estimated by the PCF and by the whole Communist movement.

A major internal problem faced the PCF as a result of the CI's 1923 victory and was in fact the consequence of that victory. It is known as the issue of 'bolshevising' the party and it took about two years to complete. The process of 'bolshevisation' began in 1920, but it was



the 5th congress of the Comintern in 1924 which actually coined the phrase and made the task a priority for all its sections. The aim was reorganisation of basically social-democratic parties 'in exact accordance with the behests of Lenin', but, so it was said, with due 'attention being paid . . . to the concrete circumstances in each country'. The last proviso was more easily stated than observed, mainly because Stalin's *ex cathedra* interpretation of 'Lenin's behests' often took precedence over what Lenin himself called 'the concrete analysis of concrete conditions'. The most important aspects of 'bolshevisation' were the creation of 'advisory committees' to assist the CC in specialised areas, the setting up of activists' groups (known as Communist 'fractions') in mass bodies such as the unions, and above all, the requirement that 'cells', especially workplace cells, should become the basic party units. The PCF belatedly complied with the last decision by going to the extreme of decreeing that all cells apart from rural ones had to be factory cells. Although 'street cells' were reintroduced by the 1926 Lille congress, the tendency remained to attach all members to factory cells. For example, the writer, André Breton, who joined in 1927 (see below), was instructed to make a report on 'the Italian situation' for the gas workers' cell by basing himself exclusively on industrial statistics. He naturally failed![13]

Another aspect of the PCF's internal life during the period under review concerns its periodic 'purges'. Initially, the word 'purge' did not have the sinister connotations it acquired under Stalin, for it simply meant getting rid of dead wood and disruptive elements. Unfortunately, right from the start, the PCF chose to accompany nearly all expulsions with character assassination and dark hints that the individuals concerned were police spies or paid agents of the bourgeoisie. After the purges of reformists which occurred until 1924, the chief ones were those of Trotskyist sympathisers – Souvarine, Monatte and Rosmer – of 'unreliable' leaders – first, Treint and Suzanne Girault, then the so-called 'Barbé-Célor group' – and finally of the rebellious Jacques Doriot. The first three were the victims of the power struggle between Stalin and Trotsky within the CPSU and the CI. In fact, it was not the PCF which expelled Souvarine, but the Comintern. His repeated applications to be readmitted were turned down, and in the end he 'broke violently with Communism'.[14] In the case of Monatte and Rosmer, the decision was taken in Paris, but the reason was the same: support for Trotsky against Stalin (1924). As for Albert Treint and Suzanne Girault, their expulsion in 1928 was partly



due to their association with Zinoviev, then in partial disgrace, but it was chiefly caused by their 'unreliability': Treint was indeed a meddler and a blunderer, and his chief claim to originality was the description of the United Front tactic as a way of 'plucking the Socialist goose' (*plumer la volaille socialiste*), a formula which later caused the PCF great harm, although only Treint had been responsible for it. As for Suzanne Girault, she was said to be bossy and was described by Humbert-Droz as 'a second-rate Catherine the Great'. Treint eventually joined the SFIO, but Suzanne Girault was readmitted to the PCF in 1933. In 1929, the man who had taken over the party secretaryship from Treint, Louis Sellier, was also expelled.

The case of the 'Barbé-Célor group' was a more serious affair. The label 'group' was applied to them by Thorez in order to suggest that they had operated as a secret faction, but actually they belonged to a triumvirate (Barbé, Célor, and Henri Lozeray) which was in charge of the party in 1929 because most of the other leaders were either in jail (among them, Thorez and Frachon) or living in hiding to avoid arrest (among them, Duclos). Thorez's case against them was that they had prevented internal discussion and were following sectarian policies. He did not add that the sectarianism was often an echo of the CI's sectarianism and that the group had enjoyed the Comintern's confidence for a while. The fight began in April 1930, when Thorez, disregarding the group's instructions (in effect the party's), decided to pay part of his fine as an alternative to staying in jail and resumed his work on the CC, to which he had been elected in 1924. In July the CC supported him against the group and appointed him as sole secretary, so that he took over from the collective secretariat elected in 1929 (Thorez, Frachon, Barbé and Célor). In July 1931 he launched a big campaign against the group's policies and methods, and during the months of August and September, published a series of articles in *L'Humanité* under significant titles such as *Pas de mannequins dans le Parti* (No robots in the Party) and *Que les bouches s'ouvrent* (Let people speak out). In many ways, he meant it, if only because without rank-and-file support, he might not have been able to defeat his opponents. Célor was expelled in 1932, Barbé in 1934, whilst Lozeray remained in the party, having 'honestly admitted his errors'.

The battle which led to Doriot's expulsion in 1934 was also long and protracted. It was partly a clash of personalities and partly a clash over policies. Doriot was a proud man who did not take kindly to team work and party discipline. In his Parisian constituency of Saint-

Denis, he had managed to build up considerable support for himself rather than the party. (He remained Saint-Denis' MP in 1936, but was eventually beaten by Fernand Grenier, a Communist.) Politically, Doriot advocated the formation of a new party which would be neither the SFIO 'whose past was one of betrayal' nor the PCF 'whose notorious impotence has been fully revealed'.[15] In March 1934 he was invited to Moscow together with Thorez in the hope that the CI could arbitrate between them, but he refused the invitation, and Thorez went alone. He was finally expelled in June and the CC charged him with paving the way to fascism. For once, this piece of character assassination was borne out by subsequent events, for Doriot later founded the semi-fascist *Parti Populaire Français*, and during the war, he eagerly collaborated with the Nazis. Doriot's expulsion closed a long chapter of trial and error for the PCF, and no further expulsions took place before 1952. This suggests that, for a while at least, the period of strains and stresses had come to an end.

The account of the PCF's internal life would not be complete without a few words about the seven congresses it held since its foundation.[16] The first two (1921 and 1922) have already been mentioned, and both were dominated by internal dissensions, which left the membership demoralised. (One delegate described the second congress as 'a congress of lunatics'!) The third one (January 1924) marked the Comintern's victory, and especially that of Humbert-Droz, whose ideas prevailed in all fields. It also adopted the electoral slogan of Workers and Peasants Bloc (which is discussed below). The fourth congress (January 1925) was important organisationally because it took the decision, later described as 'hasty', that with the exception of peasants, all members should belong to a factory cell. At the fifth congress (June 1926) new party rules were adopted and these remained in force until 1964, though they were substantially amended in 1937 and in 1945. They included the obligation to *work* in a party unit for all members, the stress on factory cells, although street cells did get a mention (on paper), the first mention of democratic centralism, which implied, among other things, the absence of factions (these had been legitimised in 1921), the downgrading of the parliamentary group, which not only had to accept party discipline but was mentioned alongside all other 'fractions' (in trade unions, co-operative societies, and the like), and the new functions of the Executive, which was re-named Central Committee, had to provide political leadership, and was expected to elect a Political Bureau and a sec-

retariat from within its ranks. The fifth congress was also significant because it was then that Thorez asserted that there was no conflict between patriotism and internationalism. It was the first time that the PCF, founded by fierce adversaries of national 'chauvinism', had so clearly claimed its attachment to the land of France. The sixth congress (March–April 1929) revealed that the PCF was far from 'monolithic', as its leadership was split between an 'opportunist' and a 'leftist' (*gauchiste*)[17] wing. Finally, the seventh congress (March 1932) discussed the effects of the world economic crisis and cautiously began to stress the need for unity with the Socialist workers; but the appeal to the latter was coupled with denunciation of their leaders. The Organisation report, presented by Duclos, boasted of a slightly increased membership but complained that the party's industrial strength in the north and in Paris was not yet matched by its implantation in other industrial areas.

In the rest of this chapter we shall examine the PCF's role in France's socio-economic life, in her political life, in foreign affairs, and among intellectuals. The first of these is dominated by the issue of the United Front. The United Front (co-operation between reformists and revolutionaries on specific issues) was Lenin's response to the new situation which emerged in Europe and in France after 1921. Hopes of an imminent revolution began to recede as it was obvious that western capitalism had entered a period of 'stabilisation'. It is to Lenin's and the Comintern's credit that they perceived the change, but their belief that the new period was transient and that a new 'revolutionary situation' would soon return proved to be historically groundless. In France the novelty of the situation was not only capitalist 'stabilisation', but the increased power of the big industrial cartels (of which the most famous was the *Comité des Forges*, going back to 1864), their links with banking interests, especially the regents of the *Banque de France*, and their successful call for national unity against Communists, depicted as bandits with a knife between their teeth. In order to defeat them, a revolutionary party had to isolate them, and to this end, to detach sections of the working class and most of the middle strata from them. Instead, even when the PCF belatedly began to implement the Comintern United Front tactic by approaching workers under social-democratic influence, its repeated emphasis on its own independence in relation to 'the bourgeoisie', big, medium and small, fostered the illusion that the class struggle in France was a neat battle between two camps, the

bourgeoisie and the working class. But this was not really the case: the medium and the petty bourgeoisie were waging their own battles against the bankers and the *Comité des Forges*. Yet all these battles ended in defeat, partly because the big banks managed to bring down the left-wing governments of the 1920s (headed by Herriot, Caillaux, Painlevé, Péret and Briand) by encouraging the export of capital, which led to the fall of the franc, and partly because militant workers were advised by the Communists to dismiss the right-wing *Bloc National* and the moderate left-wing *Cartel des Gauches* with equal contempt.

As the phrase 'United Front' was coined by Lenin and the CI, we should begin with what it means in Russian. *Edinyi Front* could mean one of three things – a single front, an indivisible whole, and joint action. The English phrase conveys the latter point and does not suggest one partner's exclusive leadership. In French, *Front Unique*, the more commonly used expression, implies that exclusive leadership, but *Front Uni* was also used and it is more akin to the English meaning. It is significant that in 1933, the PCF leadership spoke of a *Front Uni* when it appealed to the SFIO executive, and also that an entirely new phrase, *unité d'action*, was used after the 1934 SFIO-PCF pact.[18] The fact that terminological variations occurred in response to political developments shows that the issue was not one of style alone. Apart from this linguistic distinction, a political one concerns the different ways in which the phrase was interpreted by the CI. Until 1926 or so, it implied joint action with 'reformist' workers as well as their leaders, but after 1927, although the same expression was used, Stalin dogmatically decreed that social-democracy and fascism were 'twins', so that the fight against the former took precedence over the fight against the latter on the ground that it was impossible to prevent fascism without smashing social-democracy first! The United Front then became a series of appeals to rank-and-file SFIO and CGT members over the heads of their leaders and with the chief aim of 'exposing' these leaders' 'treachery'. With regard to the tactics demanded by the United Front, the choice was between unity 'at the top' (i.e. between leaders) and unity 'from below' (i.e. with the rank-and-filers). The 5th CI congress said that the 'golden rule' was: Unity at the top – never; unity at the top and from below – sometimes; unity from below – always. Neat, but not very easy to apply.

The PCF's initial reaction to the new tactic was hostile. Most of its members were bewildered: What, they exclaimed, we have just

broken with the reformists, and now we're expected to hug them like long-lost brothers! In April 1922, the party National Conference rejected the policy by 3,370 votes to 627. It was only after the CI's 1923 victory that the PCF approached the SFIO, but the latter invariably turned a deaf ear, all the more so since the Communist appeals were often couched in offensive language. (In 1926, the ECCI criticised the PCF for 'the very tone' it had used in its appeal to the SFIO congress.) By 1927, the PCF certainly applied the United Front tactic, but as it had already become associated with attacks on 'social-fascists', it is hardly surprising that the SFIO replied to the Communists' insults in kind. Instead, the Socialists sought electoral alliances with 'bourgeois' parties, an attitude which was consistent with the Second International's belief that capitalism was 'sick' and that social-democrats should be its 'physicians'.[19] Such a belief, openly expressed, further prompted Communist charges of 'betrayal'. But the PCF failed to realise that a number of ordinary workers supported the SFIO because they thought confusedly that a frontal attack upon capitalism was then premature. They may have been wrong, but this does not excuse the PCF's tactlessness in saying so. Admittedly, it called Socialist workers 'class brothers', but it was fond of adding that they were '*des frères qui ont mal tourné*' (brothers who turned out badly).

The rise of German fascism gave the issue of the United Front an added urgency, but ostensibly, the first move towards working-class unity came from outside the leaderships of the SFIO and the PCF. It was the holding of two international congresses, one held at Amsterdam in August 1932, and the other in the Pleyel Hall in Paris in June 1933. (Hence the name 'Amsterdam–Pleyel Movement'.) In fact, the Amsterdam congress was due to a PCF initiative, for its CC had encouraged Barbusse to launch an appeal against the war danger in conjunction with other prominent intellectuals. The appeal called for the holding of an international anti-war congress and was also signed by Romain Rolland. The PCF officially welcomed the move, but the SFIO expelled those of its members who attended the meeting. On 1 December 1932, Thorez officially wrote to the SFIO, suggesting a joint meeting. This time the offer was accepted and a meeting took place, but no decisions were taken. On 2 December, Thorez asserted that his party would 'not rest till [it had] achieved the unity of the proletariat' and he demanded: 'A single CGT, a single working class . . . , a single party of the proletariat'. The last point was not very

realistic. In the summer of 1933, the Socialist International appealed 'to the world workers', declaring its readiness to discuss joint anti-fascist action with the Comintern. The latter, not having been directly approached, did not reply, but advised its sections to contact the Socialist parties of their respective countries. The Second International described this as a 'manoeuvre'. The thing was turning into a tragi-comedy, and various CPs (the PCF, the CPGB, and the Czech party) urged the Comintern to start negotiations with its Socialist rival. Their proposals were turned down as 'inexpedient'. At the end of 1933, after defining fascism as 'the dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist elements of finance capital', the ECCI called upon Communists to fight for the United Front 'against the will of the treacherous leaders of social-democracy'. Thus, even at that late hour, it was advocating unity from below instead of both from below and at the top. It was only in 1934 that it changed its tune, partly because of events in France,[20] and partly under Dimitrov's influence.[21]

Electoral fortunes

Before examining the PCF's electoral record, we must bear in mind its appraisal of Parliament at that time. It believed with Lenin that 'parliamentarism' was historically obsolete and that it would soon make way for new organs of working-class power, the soviets. In the meantime, still according to Lenin, revolutionaries should stand in elections in order to expose the regime and make the workers' voice heard. One aspect which most European Communists seem to have then overlooked is that soviets were not set up artificially but arose spontaneously in the course of three Russian revolutions as alternatives to the very undemocratic Tsarist Dumas. Lenin himself was not entirely blameless in this respect, not because he expected a mechanical repetition of the Russian experience in the west, but because he urged western workers to set up their own soviets and confidently expected they would do so.[22] It is possible that he might not have clung to this belief if he had not died in 1924, but his successors certainly did, and a number of modern Communists feel that they were wrong. For example, Elleinstein suggested in 1976 that the early Communist leaders misjudged the situation by assuming that there was such a thing as 'bourgeois democracy', whereas what was open to criticism 'was [its] use by the bourgeoisie and the limits it set on [it]'.[23] Other Communists point out in partial mitigation that



before fascism, parliamentary democracy was not just *one* form of bourgeois rule but the *only* one, so that an attack on 'bourgeois rule' was bound to be an attack on parliamentary democracy. Be that as it may, nearly all contemporary Communists would agree that their predecessors were right to reject the social-democratic conception of a *purely* parliamentary road[24] and that today Parliament can be used and 'transformed' because the bourgeoisie has no further use for it.[25]

The first General Election in which the young PCF took part was held in 1924. Until then, France had been ruled by so-called 'strong men', chiefly the President of the Republic, Millerand (who was no longer a socialist, not even in name), Premier Clemenceau, and his successor since January 1922, Poincaré. Poincaré's main concern was to strengthen France's position in Europe, and in this way, to kill two birds with one stone: on the one hand, to exact huge reparations from Germany and thus wipe her out as a potential rival, and on the other, to balance the national budget by encouraging loans (from big and small investors) with the promise that 'Germany will pay'. But France's allies, Britain and the USA, were alarmed at the prospect of social unrest leading to revolution in Germany, and they compelled Poincaré to accept the Dawes Plan, which consisted of immediate credits to Germany so as to make her capable of paying reparations later. In order to exploit the discontent caused by Poincaré's failure to put France's financial house in order, the party of the urban and rural middle classes, the Radicals, decided to join with the Socialists in an electoral alliance known as the Left Bloc or *Cartel des Gauches*.

For its part, the PCF advocated the formation of another 'bloc', the Workers and Peasants Bloc, which the SFIO was invited to join. The proposed programme included short-term demands (e.g. strict application of the law on the eight-hour day) as well as long-term goals, chiefly the achievement of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Interestingly, this implied that workers' rule could be achieved without a violent revolution, but this was neither spelt out nor discussed at the time. The SFIO refused to be drawn and preferred alliance with the Radicals in a 'Left Bloc'. The 1924 elections were held under the *scrutin d'arrondissement*, which was a limited form of proportional representation.[26] The PCF stood in all *départements* bar three. It polled 875,812 votes and obtained twenty-six seats. Its best results were in the working-class areas of Paris, in the north and in a number of rural centres. Although it was an encouraging start for a newcomer, one must note that many SFIO voters remained faithful to *la vieille*

maison. The PCF's first electoral contest revealed that the party's clientèle came mostly from militant industrial workers and from discontented peasants.

Electoral victory went to the Left Bloc of Radicals and Socialists, and Herriot, a Radical, formed the government, but without SFIO participation. A year later, he resigned because he had been defeated in the Senate, the French Upper House, over his financial policies.[27] After a succession of five governments in ten months, the right-winger, Poincaré, formed a government of 'national unity' (July 1926). He was greeted derisively by Cachin with the comment, 'You're only seen in times of misfortune'. The PCF's fight against the new government was a mixture of verbal violence, both in Parliament and outside, and ineffectiveness, as public opinion had been reassured by the return of a cautious statesman who was going to 'save the franc'.

In the 1928 General Election, the PCF found itself at a double disadvantage, first because it had been instructed by the Comintern to apply the 'class against class' tactic, and secondly, because the new electoral law worked against it. The aim of the Comintern tactic was to contest all elections on a strictly 'class basis', i.e. that 'workers' candidates' should stand against 'bourgeois candidates'. In France, this meant PCF–SFIO alliance only if the latter agreed to sever all relations with 'bourgeois parties' in the name of 'class solidarity', which it predictably refused to do. Moreover, with a two-ballot election, the tactic involved the refusal of the PCF to stand down in the second round and its appeal to the electorate to observe 'class discipline' instead of traditional 'republican discipline'. Although the policy claimed to be unimpeachably orthodox by substituting a strict division between exploiters and exploited for the traditional division between right and left, it was a caricature of Marxism because it ignored existing realities and because it neglected, except in words, the need for alliances. It was bound to lead, as indeed it did, to the PCF's splendid isolation. The party leadership was deeply divided over it, with Thorez being wholly in favour, Doriot and Rappoport against, and others sitting on the fence. At the 11 January 1928 CC meeting, the tactic was adopted by twenty-three votes to thirteen. As for the electoral law, it had just been passed with the overt intention of reducing Communist influence. It was known as the *scrutin d'arrondissement à deux tours* and it set up the now familar two-ballot system, i.e. a second round if no candidate secures an absolute major-

ity at the first ballot. On the government's behalf, Sarraut frankly admitted that with PR, the PCF might obtain seventy or eighty seats, which would be 'disastrous'. Whether his forecast was accurate or not, the PCF, with over 1 million votes at the first ballot, got only fourteen seats, whereas the right-wing *Union Républicaine Démocratique*, with roughly the same number of votes, ended up with 142 seats. The PCF claimed that such figures could not instil great faith in the fairness of 'bourgeois democracy'.

The first round of the elections gave the PCF a net gain of 200,000 votes by comparison with 1924. This, however, was not a vindication of the 'class against class' tactic because many party members simply failed to apply it. Moreover, at the first ballot, no single Communist got an absolute majority, and according to Humbert-Droz, Stalin was horrified and said it was totally unacceptable that there should be no Communists in the French Chamber. At an emergency meeting of the ECCI, he argued in favour of electoral agreements between the PCF and the SFIO in Paris and the north, but Humbert-Droz fought against his proposal. In the end, a compromise was reached, advising a deal with the SFIO in about ten constituencies. Both the PCF leadership and the membership were utterly confused, but the SFIO position was equally confused. As a result, both parties lost seats: among the fourteen PCF deputies, there was Duclos, who beat Blum, but not Thorez, and some fifty Socialists were not re-elected. It is difficult to ascertain the precise extent of Communist losses between the two ballots because the party's tactics were not uniform. Some historians suggest a drop of one half, others of one third.[28] What is beyond doubt is that the drop was substantial. The party's strongholds were Paris, the industrial north, the Lot and Garonne area, and the centre-west. The elections were won by the centre-right coalition, the *Union Nationale*, and Poincaré formed a government, with Radical participation. The PCF's opposition to it continued to be vocal but ineffectual. For its part, the government intensified its repression of communism, and Thorez was one of the many leaders arrested. In July 1929 Poincaré resigned and was succeeded by short-lived governments headed by Briand, Tardieu, Steeg, Chautemps and Laval. Whatever their party labels, there was little difference between one Prime Minister and another, and it was not grossly inaccurate for the PCF to lump them all in the same 'bourgeois' bag. However, this blanket condemnation also revealed the party's inability to have any real impact on political developments. As a compensation, it decided

to step up working-class struggles on the economic front, and at its seventh congress (March 1932), it described the organisation of these struggles as 'the preparation of the counter-offensive of the working class'.

In October 1929 the Wall Street crash ushered in a period of economic and political crisis in the western world, but as we shall see in the next chapter, France was not immediately affected, so that the General Election of May 1932 was held under the illusion that the country was lucky to have escaped the worst effects of the slump. This, however, did not help the ruling parties very much because France's comparative prosperity, even if more apparent than real, had encouraged the belief that the left should be given another chance. As a result, the *Cartel* was returned to power, and once again, Herriot became Prime Minister. A Socialist, Paul Boncour, joined the government, against the party's wishes, and later became Prime Minister himself, after Herriot had lost parliamentary and popular support for having asked the Chamber to authorise payment of an instalment of France's debt to the USA, in spite of the fact that since June 1931 Germany had ceased to pay any reparations. Boncour was equally unable to solve France's financial problems, and the pattern of short-lived governments continued unabated: between January 1933 and May 1934, there were seven different governments, headed by Daladier, Sarraut, Chautemps, Daladier again, Doumergue, Laval and Sarraut.

To return to the 1932 General Election, the PCF was still committed to the 'class against class' tactic, but the rise of Hitler in Germany, the first effects of the crisis in France, and the undisputed leadership of Thorez inside the party all contributed to soften the tactic considerably. For example, well before the parliamentary elections were due, in August 1931, Thorez had announced that the PCF would seek agreements with SFIO *sections* on second ballot withdrawals in all elections. The Socialist paper, *Le Populaire*, declared that 'Moscow' had finally realised its own stupidity, but added that there was nothing doing. 'We shall never ask anything from the Bolsheviks,' it wrote in its 6 September 1931 issue, 'we'll kick their teeth in.' A few days later, Paul Faure, referring to the Open Letter to Socialist Workers which contained Thorez's proposals, stated somewhat rudely: 'It would be an insult to Socialist workers to imagine that their reply would consist of anything over a five-letter word.' (An allusion to the word *Merde*, which is often euphemistically referred to as a



five-letter word.) Undeterred, Thorez asserted in the 26 September issue of *L'Humanité*: 'The workers in your party do not think like you, Monsieur Paul Faure.' It was not quite untrue, because the response of *some* Socialist workers had not been hostile. In the cantonal elections which preceded the parliamentary ones, the main winners were the Radicals and the Socialists. The PCF made a few gains in the north, but nearly everywhere else it lost votes. The General Election results were even worse. Although the right-wing was beaten by the Radicals and the Socialists, Communists fared very badly, losing 280,000 votes, their percentage of the poll being only 8.4 per cent. (It was 11.25 per cent in 1928 and 9.3 per cent in 1924.) The CC blamed it all on the 'Barbé–Célor group' (a convenient scapegoat), on the electoral law, and on the government's crude attempt to charge French Communists with complicity in the just-committed assassination of President Doumer by a Russian émigré, Gorgulov. The Comintern's sectarianism and its harmful effects on the PCF were not mentioned.

'Anti-imperialism'

In accordance with 'Lenin's behests', the PCF took up an 'anti-imperialist' stand in foreign policy. It was probably the only area where it behaved as a Leninist party. For Lenin had strongly asserted that one of the key features of parties 'of a new type' was their refusal to support their own governments in their struggle against 'imperialist rivals' and against the national-liberation movements in the colonies. The first time the PCF was put to the test was when it was barely two years old and came out against Poincaré's decision to occupy the Ruhr in 1923. A number of prominent Communists were arrested for having attended an international conference in Essen at which an appeal was issued calling upon workers to regard German and French capitalism as their 'common enemy'. Cachin's parliamentary immunity was lifted. But Poincaré's policy was unpopular and was attacked by Radicals and Socialists, so that in the end, in the face of opposition from France's allies, he withdrew the troops. The PCF chalked this up as a victory.

Two years later, French Communists opposed the government's war on the Riffan nationalists in Morocco, led by Abdel Krim. The PCF sent Abdel Krim a telegram pledging support, and to match its words with deeds, it set up an Action Committee against the war under the presidency of Thorez, and staged a twenty-four-hour pro-

test strike on 12 October 1925. The party claimed that it was followed by 900,000 workers, but it conceded that the figure might have been higher if it had not insisted on acceptance of all its demands, especially that of full independence for the colonies. At Puteaux, one of the demonstrators was shot dead by the police, and there were many arrests, including that of Doriot. Thorez was sentenced to fourteen months' imprisonment and had to go into hiding.

A third instance of the PCF's 'proletarian internationalism' was its solidarity with the Soviet Union and its campaign against anti-Soviet war plans. Solidarity with 'the first land of socialism' was of course a matter of principle for all Communists. The PCF in particular blindly swallowed the whole of Soviet propaganda, over-emphasing the achievements and refusing to acknowledge the existence of dark patches. But anti-Soviet propaganda was equally one-sided: the uneducated were told that the Bolsheviks were monsters and the more sophisticated that the Soviet system was on the verge of collapse. As for the 'war plans' which were said to be made by western governments, they were described by the PCF as stemming from the 'fury' of bourgeois politicians at the thought of the USSR's industrial and agricultural 'successes'. On 1 August 1929, chosen by the Comintern as an international action day against the threat of anti-Soviet war, the French party tried to stage a big demonstration. It was not very successful, mainly because the government had arrested many Communists as a 'preventive measure' and because large detachments of police were called in to deal with trouble-makers.

On the Alsatian question, the PCF suggested autonomy for the region on the ground that the population had its own dialect and culture and was neither French nor German. But the party was keen to stress that its stand was not anti-French, and in April 1933 Thorez told Parliament: 'We, proletarians, love France, but we do not love her in the same way as the bourgeois. We are proud of the Revolution, we are proud of the Commune, but we blush with shame when we think of the oppression which Alsace is undergoing.' Gérard Walter claims that in making such a statement, the first of many in this vein, Thorez was not following Comintern directives, but merely 'his own inspiration',[29] and he adds that Dimitrov's advice to all Communists that they should be patriots as well as revolutionaries was not given before August 1935. Be that as it may, it is a fact that to this day the PCF has included patriotism as one of its main features, and at times, it has been charged by ultra-left critics with 'nationalism'.

The PCF and intellectuals: pacifists, surrealists

During the period under review, the PCF's relations with intellectuals were a mixture of harmony and tension. Although it was in the late post-war period (the 1970s) that intellectuals were drawn towards the party *en masse* rather than as individuals,[30] the PCF's appeal to the intelligentsia has always been one of its most original characteristics. No other French party can claim to have included in its ranks so many writers, artists and scientists, but in 1960, Aragon confided to an interviewer that in order to join the PCF in the 1920s – and what is more, in order to remain a member of it – one had to be 'a little mad'. There is much truth in this facetious sally, and it constitutes a criticism of both the party's narrow-minded 'workerism'[31] and of the political inexperience of left-wing intellectuals. When the PCF was founded, the intellectuals it attracted were those who had just experienced the horrors of the first world war and who saw in communism the only way out of 'barbarism'. Not all of them joined immediately, some in fact always remained aloof, but 'the party of peace', as the PCF appeared to many, stood out as an inspiration to them. Aragon and Breton, two young poets in 1921, and not yet the founders of the surrealist movement, had been so moved by Clara Zetkin's appearance at the Tours Congress, which to them symbolised Franco-German brotherhood on a new basis, that they tried to join the new party. As it happened, they were put off by the vulgarity of the official who received them, and it was not until 1927 that they took the plunge.

If the future surrealists were not yet ready for the party, others were, especially Barbusse and Paul Vaillant-Courturier. The former, at first a pacifist, founded an ex-servicemen's association, the ARAC, with political aims. It had the blessing of Romain Rolland and Anatole France.[32] He also founded the journal, *Clarté*, which was pacifist and anti-establishment, and in 1923, he joined the PCF. He eventually left *Clarté*, as he found most of the contributors too narrow in their outlook, but he continued to be the party's main spokesman on cultural matters, although he was regarded with suspicion by some Marxists for his allegedly excessive interest in Jesus, whom he presented as a great revolutionary. From 1932 onwards, he helped, together with Romain Rolland, to build the anti-fascist Amsterdam–Pleyel Movement. He died in 1935 and large crowds attended his funeral. As for *Clarté*, it was unsuccessful in enlisting the surrealists' support in 1926, and in 1928, it was taken over by Naville, a Trots-

kyist, and changed its name to *La Lutte des Classes.*[33] Vaillant-Couturier began his political career by taking up an anti-militaristic stand inside the SFIO, although he took part in the fighting and was mentioned in despatches no fewer than seven times. At the Tours Congress, as we have seen, he was one of the pro-affiliation speakers and was elected to the party executive, a position he kept until his death in 1937. His strong personality deeply affected many of his comrades, including Aragon and Gabriel Péri; the latter paid him tribute just before he was shot by the Nazis in 1941.

The next group of intellectuals to join the PCF were the surrealists. Surrealism was founded in 1922 and was an offshoot of 'Dada', a trend, initiated a few years earlier by Tristan Tzara, which advocated the rejection of one and every value. Surrealism wanted to go beyond this purely negative revolt, and it set itself the aim of discovering a reality which was higher (*la sur-réalité*) than that which is apprehended in everyday life. It was the reality revealed by dreams and the sub-conscious. This had little to do with the class struggle and the dictatorship of the proletariat, but it was a rejection of 'bourgeois thinking'. As the PCF was the anti-bourgeois party *par excellence*, there seemed to be a community of outlook between the two movements. Until 1925, the two ignored each other, mainly because the surrealists were not greatly interested in politics. The task of building socialism as distinct from that of smashing the old world, mostly in words, seemed too dull to be taken seriously. Aragon even described the Russian Revolution as 'a vague ministerial crisis' and spoke of '*Moscou la gâteuse*' (doddering Moscow). In 1925, however, the PCF's pro-Abdel Krim stand fired the surrealists' imagination and they drew closer to the one party which had not joined in the jingoist 'hysteria' against the Riffan nationalists. The climax of the rapprochement came in 1927, when Breton applied for membership of the PCF, and was followed by four of his colleagues, Aragon (who remained a member), Paul Eluard, Pierre Unik and Benjamin Péret. Their party membership did not substantially change their outlook or improve their relations with Barbusse, unfairly regarded as a party hack. Very soon, they clashed with the PCF leadership. The main bone of contention was that their conception of an artist's role was at variance with the party's. They did not merely demand absence of bureaucratic control in the literary field, but the right to interpret Marxism in their own way, and if need be, to bring it into line with Freudism and other modern trends. The party replied that Marxism was the collective



responsibility of all Communists, and furthermore, that there was no Chinese Wall between art and politics.

The whole debate might have been conducted in a vigorous but friendly manner had not each of the participants displayed stubborn unwillingness to meet the other half way. The surrealists simply refused to discuss aesthetic matters with 'incompetent' politicians, whereas the PCF leaders behaved arrogantly and felt deep down that these 'sons of the rich' had to be taken down a peg or two. The decision to assign them all to factory cells did not help. A few months after joining, most of the surrealists severed all connections with the PCF.[34] In 1930, they changed the name of their journal from *La Révolution Surréaliste* to *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution* and stated that if imperialism declared war on Soviet Russia, their position would 'conform to the directives of the Third International and to the position of the French Communist Party'. The same issue of the review, however, carried an article by Breton on Mayakovsky's suicide which attacked Barbusse, rejected the possibility of a 'proletarian art', and claimed that supporting the working class and liberating the human mind were both necessary but represented 'two distinct dramas'. Matters came to a head over the so-called Aragon Affair, which exploded in 1932 and was sparked off by the publication in 1931 of a poem, *Front Rouge*, in which Aragon provocatively called upon workers to 'open fire' on their enemies, including 'the performing bears of social-democracy'. The author was charged with 'incitement to murder' and he faced prosecution. The surrealists defended him on the ground that 'open fire' was a poetic metaphor and that one should not give 'legal significance to a poetic work'. Aragon rejected this kind of defence and was supported by the party. When Breton tried to clarify matters and to vindicate his stand in a brochure entitled *Misère de la poésie* (by analogy with Marx's *Misère de la philosophie*), the members of the newly-founded French section of the International Union of Revolutionary Writers (Aragon himself, Georges Sadoul, Luis Bunuel, Pierre Unik, and Maxime Alexandre) described the book as 'incompatible with the class struggle and consequently as objectively counter-revolutionary'. Once the label 'counter-revolutionary' had been used in the party press, it was obvious that the surrealists had become enemies of the PCF. One may note that Aragon was not charged in the end, and furthermore, that Eluard rejoined the party during the second world war and died a Communist in 1952.

Finally, two other groups of intellectuals deserve a brief mention. One was made up of philosophers and included Georges Politzer, Paul Nizan, Henri Lefebvre, Pierre Morhange, Norbert Guterman and Georges Friedmann.[35] In their case, too, it was the PCF's stand during the war against Abdel Krim which triggerred off their interest in the party and eventually led to their joining it in 1927. In 1929 they founded the *Revue Marxiste*. The other group was made up of teachers, and one of their members was Georges Cogniot, who later became a leading PCF and Comintern official. He joined in 1921 and died in 1978.

The most detailed study of the PCF's early period (up to the mid-1920s) is Robert Wohl's. It ends on a critical note: after saying that the party's appeal rested on the fact that the French worker was then '. . . a leper who could neither surmount nor destroy the walls that hemmed him in. Hence his susceptibility to Communist appeals', he adds that this explains '. . . why the effect of Communism on French national life has been so unfailingly reactionary. Instead of breaking through walls of non-communication that separated Frenchmen, Communism deliberately set out to reinforce them'.[36] This calls for a few comments. First, the 'ghetto' in which the French working class found itself should not be overstressed, and one need only bear in mind that the PCF lost its initial appeal, partly because many workers simply did not feel that they had 'nothing to lose but their chains' in a communist revolution. Secondly, it is true that the young PCF was often sectarian, as has been pointed out above, but it is somewhat strange to charge it with failure to break through 'the walls of non-communication that separated Frenchmen' for this is tantamount to accusing it of being Marxist! It is an axiom of Marxist political faith that, whether we like it or not, there is a split under capitalism anyway, the split between the 'exploiters' (and their supporters) and the 'exploited'. The PCF may have often presented the split in an uncompromising way and it may have under-estimated the differences both among the working class and the non-exploiting population, but it would not have been faithful to its doctrine had it not stood *for* the working class and *against* the bourgeoisie. Moreover, as we shall see in the next chapter, the PCF eventually realised that in order to defeat its 'class enemy', it had to build broad popular unity against it, but admittedly, this realisation came after the period covered by Wohl. Discussing the latter's assessment, Tiersky writes: 'A critic of such a point of view might well ask how the Communist

actions of 1936–37 and 1944–46 periods of great social reform and the only periods when the PCF was associated with the national government – fit into such an argument.'[37]

The chief difficulties encountered by the PCF until 1933 were partly of its own making (and the Comintern's) and partly beyond its control. Its uncritical support of the USSR and Stalin led the majority of non-Communists not only to regard it as a 'foreign party', but to assume that the faults and limitations of the Soviet Union were caused by socialism itself rather by the errors of its followers. In addition, the problem of working out a strategy for the immediate present as well as for the distant feature was not solved, with the result that the PCF's impact on French national life was not so much 'reactionary', as Wohl asserts, but very limited. What its enemies were fond of calling 'the Communist threat' was more potential than real. The external circumstances which hampered the PCF more than anything else were the SFIO's and the government's hostility. Before 1934, the Socialists refused the slightest co-operation with the Communists if it did not involve the public admission that the choice made at Tours had been misguided. As for the government, we have already seen that its repressive measures against communism meant in effect that the PCF's apprenticeship period was also a period of semi-clandestine existence. In the early 1930s, the prospects for the party were gloomy. It needed a new strategy to reverse this negative trend. The new strategy, known as the building of a Popular Front, was first launched in 1934, and this year marks the end of the PCF's apprenticeship period. We shall examine it in the next chapter.

At this stage, it is worth giving a general view of the party's subsequent history, of its gradual 'coming of age'. The process went through four stages: the first sign of maturity was the Popular Front initiative (cf. Chapter 3); it was followed by the Communists' role in the war and the liberation, leading to their first ever government participation (cf. Chapters 4 and 5); thirdly, after a marking time period (cf. Chapter 5), the PCF began, slowly and gradually, to work out an independent strategy (cf. Chapters 6 and 7); finally, the party came of age in relation to the international Communist movement (cf. Chapter 8) and passed from opposition to its second government participation (cf. Chapter 9).

Notes

1 R. Tiersky, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
2 R. Wohl, *op. cit.*, p. 395.
3 Thorez liked to refer to himself as an ex-miner; actually, he was not, but he came from a mining family.
4 J. Duclos, *Mémoires* (Fayard, 1968–72), vol. 1, p. 197.
5 R. Wohl, *op. cit.*, p. 327.
6 Actually, in 1930, Thorez became the party sole secretary. He was made General Secretary in 1936.
7 R. Wohl, *op. cit.*, p. 430.
8 Cf. Fauvet, *op. cit.*, p. 110.
9 Cf. P. Robrieux, *Maurice Thorez, Vie Secrète et Vie Publique* (Fayard, 1975).
10 Giulio Ceretti was an Italian Communist who lived in France between 1927 and 1939 and rose to become a PCF CC member. After the war he played a leading role in the PCI. He has written an account of his association with Thorez and Togliatti, *A l'ombre des deux T* (Julliard, 1973).
11 R. Wohl, *op. cit.*, p. 309.
12 *Ibid.*, p. 447.
13 Cf. André Breton, *Manifestes du surréalisme* (Gallimard, 1965), p. 99.
14 R. Wohl, *op. cit.*, p. 426.
15 Quoted by G. Walter, *op. cit.*, p. 270.
16 This figure does not include the 'administrative congress' held in May 1921 to draw up new party rules.
17 *Gauchiste* is the term used by the PCF to describe ultra-left tendencies within its own ranks as well as groups which claim to be further left than the CP. The essence of *gauchisme* is the rejection of compromises and the belief in imminent revolution.
18 Cf. below, Ch. 3, p. 71.
19 At its 1931 Leipzig congress, the German Social-democratic party stated: 'We must be the physicians of ailing capitalism.'
20 Cf. below, Ch. 3, pp. 68–71.
21 Dimitrov became the CI secretary after his release from a Nazi jail in 1933 (cf. below, Ch. 3, p. 69). In July 1934 he urged a new approach to social-democracy.
22 One must also note that Lenin did not regard soviets as the abolition of representative institutions but as their transformation 'from mere "talking shops" into working bodies' (*The State and Revolution*).
23 J. Elleinstein, *Le P.C.* (Grasset, 1976), p. 16.
24 Today's PCF asserts that both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary struggles are needed.
25 Cf. below, Ch. 7, pp. 208–10.
26 Under that law, parties presented a list in each *département*. The number of candidates was equivalent to the number of deputies allocated to the *département*, so that an entire list could be the winning one if it included those who had polled the highest number of votes. In other cases, the

distribution of seats took place according to each party's respective voting strength.

27 He had uttered a vague threat to tax capital and this was enough to bring down the value of the franc on the international market and to start a panic lest the government were unable to repay those who had invested in state bonds.

28 Cf. G. Walter, *op. cit.*, pp. 191–2, and C. Willard, *Socialisme et communisme français* (Armand Colin, 1978), p. 123.

29 G. Walter, *op. cit.*, p. 287.

30 Cf. below, Ch. 7, pp. 212–3.

31 'Workerism' is an attitude of contempt for all those who do not work with their hands. Communists concede that no working-class party is immunised against it.

32 Romain Rolland never joined the party, but was close to it, especially during the anti-fascist period (1932–8). There is some doubt concerning Anatole France: Jean Fréville (in *La Nuit finit à Tours* (Editions Sociales, 1970), p. 168) claims that he took up a party card, but Fauvet (cf. *op. cit.*, p. 49 n 6) is sceptical. However, there is no doubt at all that Anatole France came out publicly in support of communism. According to J. P. Brunet, he remained faithful to it 'until his death in 1924'. (*Histoire du P.C.F.* (PUF, 1982), p. 24.

33 Today *Le Nouveau Clarté* is the organ of Communist students.

34 There is some doubt concerning the actual date of their departure. According to Aragon, this happened 'a few weeks' after their joining, but Alain Duhamel (who contributed a few chapters to Fauvet, *op. cit.*) writes that it took place in 1932 and 1933. (cf. *op. cit.*, p. 117.) J. P. Brunet gives 1933 as the year when Breton and Eluard were expelled (cf. *op. cit.*, p. 45).

35 The most famous were the first three. Politzer expounded Marxist theory both in his writings and in his lectures at the Communist *Université Ouvrière*. He was shot by the Nazis in 1942. Paul Nizan became the foreign affairs editor of the PCF evening daily, *Ce Soir*. He left the party in 1939 (over the Soviet–German pact) and died in 1940. At the time of his defection, and for many years since, the party branded him as a 'spy', but he was rehabilitated in the 1970s. Henri Lefebvre played an important theoretical role in the party before he resigned in 1956 (over Hungary). In 1977 he welcomed the PCF's new course, but did not rejoin.

36 R. Wohl, *op. cit.*, p. 446.

37 R. Tiersky, *op. cit.*, p. 327.

CHAPTER 3

Maturity: the Popular Front (1934–8)

Origins and nature of the Popular Front

The Popular Front strategy was meant as the left's response to the 1929–32 world economic crisis and to the 1933–4 fascist threat. The world crisis, which began with the dramatic 1929 Wall Street crash, affected France later than most other countries, because between 1913 and 1929 she had become a money-lending state rather than an advanced industrial state, so that both her bankers and her industrialists (many of them operating small and medium self-financing firms) had the comfortable illusion they were protected against the ups and downs of the international market. The illusion was soon shattered, and when the crisis came, it came with a vengeance, hitting nearly all sections of society. First, the French banks were made to realise that the franc fell because it was dependent on the devalued pound sterling, itself closely linked to the American dollar. Then, French foreign trade, depending on the sale of luxury items, began to decline. Finally, production fell by about 40 per cent between 1928 and 1934. This, however, does not mean that all capitalists suffered a loss in profits, for one must distinguish between the 'sheltered' and 'unsheltered' sectors. The former included credit institutions as well as big trusts in engineering, chemicals, iron and steel, coal, shipbuilding and sugar refinery. Because of their monopoly position, their protective tariffs, and the pressure they were able to exert on governments, these firms made profits in spite of the crisis. Together with the regents of the Bank of France (described by the left as 'the two hundred families')[1] they exploited the crisis to increase the concentration of wealth and power into their hands. The non-sheltered sector included smaller iron and steel concerns; shops; hotels; the luxury goods, woollen, textile and silk industries; coal-mining; motor industries; and business banks. This unprotected sector, no longer able to compete against foreign rivals such as Japan who were selling the same goods more cheaply, incurred a catastrophic fall in profits, sometimes in the region of 60 per cent.

In addition, the whole working population suffered from the crisis.



First, the industrial workers (six million out of a total working population of twenty-one million) faced drastic wage reductions (between 24 and 30 per cent) and rising unemployment (from 150,000 in 1931 to half a million in 1935, a figure which does not include the million or so who were not entitled to unemployment benefits and thus were not registered as jobless). Secondly, the five to six million wage-earners such as clerical workers (800,000), domestic servants (700,000) and the like also had their total incomes greatly reduced. Thirdly, there was the rural population (about half the total). It included poorly-paid agricultural proletarians and peasants owning a small plot of land whose conditions were appalling because of taxes, high prices, debts, and the middlemen who pocketed most of their gains. The crisis made matters worse, especially as peasants produced more grain than they could sell at reasonable prices. Finally, the urban middle classes (shopkeepers, small traders, and professional people such as doctors, barristers and the like) were hit because of higher prices, insecurity, and the fall in value of their modest shares.

According to the PCF, the crisis was a heaven-sent opportunity for fascist demagogues, to whom the 'two hundred families' were sure to turn, just as their like had done in Italy and Germany. The need to build a broad popular alliance against the fascist threat was therefore at the heart of the Popular Front policy. In order to evolve such a policy, the PCF needed to understand the nature of fascism and to reappraise its own past policies. The understanding of fascism was provided by the Comintern, although it came very late. (In the case of Germany, it came too late.) Despite the misguided emphasis on the fight against social-democracy, with the result that the European working class remained divided,[2] the CI was aware that fascism represented 'the terroristic dictatorship of big capital', as its 1928 programme put it. A more precise definition was given by the 1933 13th ECCI Plenum, and it became the classic Communist analysis of fascism ever since: the latter was no longer said to be the dictatorship of 'big capital' in general, but of 'the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist elements of finance capital', thus implying that other sections of the capitalist class could be drawn into the struggle against it. The Plenum also noted that the 'mass basis' of fascism was the petty bourgeoisie and 'the declassed elements in the big cities' and that its demagogic appeals could even find a response among the working class.

This analysis of fascism was not that of Social-democrats, who,



initially at any rate, were deceived by the middle-class character of the movement and possibly by the fact that, at first, German financiers had backed the less extreme nationalist groups rather than the Nazis. However, the example of Italy should have opened their eyes, for Mussolini had also started as the self-proclaimed champion of the petty bourgeoisie and had ended up as the *protégé* of big business, which saw in his 'corporate state' the ideal way of destroying working-class and democratic opposition. Equally revealing was the attempt by both German and Italian fascists to describe all working-class organisations, Socialist parties, trade unions etc., as 'Marxist' and 'dangerous'. In France, the SFIO had become so 'constitutional' in its approach that it really believed that constitutional means alone could defeat fascism, and when in 1932 Hitler lost two million votes, Blum confidently forecast that the road to power was now 'closed to National-Socialism' and that 'German Social-democracy [had] got the better of Hitler'. A minority of French Socialists, such as Marquet and Déat, even claimed that fascism had shown the revolutionary potential of the middle classes and proved that 'the fascist road' could lead to socialism. Marquet and Déat were eventually expelled and they ended up as collaborators during the war. Their importance should not be overstressed, but they show to what lengths ideological disarray had gone in the Socialist Party. No wonder that Blum declared himself 'terrified' when he heard Marquet at the party congress.

No such disarray occurred in the PCF. There, the mistake had not been one of misunderstanding the true nature of fascism, but of seeing signs of 'fascisation' in social-democracy, a mistake which originated in the Comintern. It began to be corrected in 1932, but not without blunders and contradictory stances. In 1934, and still more in the years that followed, attacks on social-democracy were increasingly replaced by the impassioned denunciation of fascism. Moreover, the PCF took it upon itself to explain that Hitler's ambitions included the destruction of France, described in *Mein Kampf* as Germany's 'hereditary enemy'. Thorez was one of the few French political leaders who had actually read Hitler's book and had taken it seriously. He and his party were able to show that the fascist threat was not merely internal but external as well, and that the fight against fascism was also a fight against the war danger, war being essential to the Nazi economy. It is customary to see in this last aspect an echo of Soviet preoccupations about Nazi Germany's openly 'anti-Bolshevik' policy

and to conclude that French Communists were more concerned about Russia's security than France's. We shall presently return to the USSR's role in the Popular Front strategy, but in the meantime, we may agree with Professor Cobban that it is 'rarely possible to say of a switch in the policy of any Communist party how far it was the result of a directive from Moscow, or how far the local party may have taken the initiative'.[3]

The reappraisal of past PCF policy and thinking concerned five main areas. First, the need to revive the United Front with the Socialists and cease all attacks on the SFIO. This went beyond Lenin's broad conception of the United Front, for as Thorez forcefully put it at the party's national conference in June 1934, it had to be achieved 'at all costs'. Even if Communists remained convinced that Social-democrats preferred the managing of capitalism to its destruction, the novel point they made was that 'pressure from below' could bring about a change of policy, if not a change of heart, and that the SFIO leadership could hardly resist the pressure, since the aim was not revolution but urgent reforms. One may note that to this day this has remained the PCF's approach to its rival. Secondly, it was necessary to re-examine the role of the middle classes. Long before, Marx had dismissed as 'nonsense' the view put forward in the 1875 Gotha Programme that the middle classes formed 'one reactionary mass', and Lenin after him had stressed the possibility of winning them over. But apart from the fact that past PCF practice of emphasising Communist 'independence' in relation to 'the bourgeoisie' as a whole constituted a drawback, the situation in the 1930s was entirely new in as much as it was not a question of allaying the petty bourgeoisie's fears of revolution, but of involving it in a democratic struggle against fascism. That was deemed realistic because fascism was against its economic interests since it represented the domination of big business; moreover, it was deemed indispensable because otherwise, the fascists might enlist its support on the basis of their slogans against the 'plutocracy'. The PCF's national conference in 1934 declared unambiguously: 'Without the middle classes we cannot beat fascism.'

The third area was the reappraisal of 'bourgeois democracy'. The new Communist approach consisted in saying that 'soviet democracy' was superior to 'bourgeois democracy', but that the latter was better than no democracy at all, which was just what would happen under fascism. The PCF rejected the fascist-inspired slogan, 'Either fasc-

ism or communism', and replaced it with 'Either fascism or democracy'. To quote again from the 1934 conference, whilst exposing the 'degeneration of bourgeois democracy which paves the way for fascism', Communists 'defend and will defend all the democratic freedoms won by the masses themselves'. Mussolini's boast that his movement was 'the antithesis of the immortal 1789 principles' provided the PCF with a golden opportunity of issuing the counter-boast that it was the 'heir of the Jacobins' and to stress through Thorez: 'Well, it suits us, Communist proletarians, sons of the people of France . . . that the question be put in that way: DEMOCRACY OR FASCISM.'[4]

Fourthly, the anti-fascist strategy required a new approach to patriotism. It had long been customary in the Communist movement to quote the famous *Communist Manifesto* saying, 'The workers have no country', and to forget that Marx and Engels go on to say: 'We cannot take from them what they have not got. Since the proletariat . . . must constitute itself *the* nation, it is itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word.' The PCF restored the statement in full and added that the modern bourgeoisie had lost all claims to be patriotic since it put its class interests before the nation's. The party's favourite slogan in the Popular Front period was 'For a free, strong and happy France'. The most spectacular expression of the new approach was what came to be known as the 'reconciliation between the *Marseillaise* and the *Internationale*'. Recalling that the former had been written for a fighting bourgeoisie and the people, united against feudal Europe, French Communists claimed that it belonged to the working masses rather than to a smug bourgeois establishment, and they called on their supporters to sing both revolutionary anthems (which is invariably the case at PCF public meetings today). It was time, they said, that the people should 'regain their own *Marseillaise*'. More importantly, in a radio speech made in April 1936, Thorez asserted that 'It is neither in Rome nor in Berlin, nor in any foreign capital, not even in Moscow, to which we Communists do not hide our deep attachment, that the fate of our people will be decided: *it is in Paris*'. At home, the party's new image involved a changed attitude towards the family and concern for France's falling birthrate. In foreign affairs, the PCF welcomed the 1935 Franco–Soviet pact and endorsed the final communique issued after the Stalin–Laval talks, especially the following sentence: 'Mr. Stalin understands and fully approves of the policy of national defence pursued by

France. . . .' When one recalls the bitter denunciation of 'national defence' at the Tours congress and since, one can imagine that such a statement might have proved embarrassing. In fact, Laval, who was then Foreign Affairs minister, had hoped he would be able to attack the PCF on nothing less than Stalin's authority. But the party covered the walls of Paris with posters saying 'Stalin is right' (it could hardly have said that he was wrong!) and proceeded to explain that national defence against a would-be fascist aggressor could and should be supported by the working class because it was vitally interested in keeping France free from foreign fascists.

Finally, in order to broaden the anti-fascist alliance, the PCF appealed to the Catholics. In doing so, it had to break not with its own doctrine but with a strong anti-clerical tradition in France. Marxist materialism is not *anti*-Christian; it is rather a philosophy which claims that the root of all religions is unhappiness on earth: faced with poverty and insecurity, many people seek comfort in a heavenly father. The task of revolutionaries is to make this form of 'escape' unnecessary – by building a better world. There is no reason why believers should not contribute to this task, as it does not involve the giving up of their faith but simply the will to end social injustice. In 1905, Lenin said that unity to build 'paradise on earth' mattered more than divisions of opinion about 'paradise in heaven'. In adopting a broad policy towards Christians, all the PCF had to do was to apply the teachings of its masters. However, it was not as simple as that, for the issue of *laïcité* (a secular state, separate from the Church) had long been a bone of contention between French Catholics and the left. The PCF asserted that a secular state was not *ipso facto* an anti-religious state, but one which tolerated all religions without officially supporting any. It further added that Christians should not be taken in by the fascists' claim that Christian values would fare better under their rule – how could terrorism and torture be called Christian values? The party's new approach came to be known as *la politique de la main tendue* (the policy of the outstretched hand) because it was inaugurated by the following statement in Thorez's 1936 speech: 'We hold out our hand to you, Catholic (*nous te tendons la main, catholique*), worker, office worker, craftsman, peasant, we whose outlook is secular, because you are our brother, and because you are like us burdened with the same cares.' A few weeks later, the Communist leader repeated his appeal, saying that believers and unbelievers should keep their respective views but 'unite in the common struggle for the good

of our people and our country'.

A PCF initiative?

We must now examine the PCF's role in launching the new strategy. That the Popular Front was a Communist initiative is admitted by everyone, but opinions vary as to whether it was the PCF itself or the Soviet government, via the Comintern, which was responsible for putting it forward in the first place. In order to avoid confusion, one must distinguish between the two stages of the policy – the United Front with Socialists, i.e. working-class unity, and the extension of the alliance to the Radicals, i.e. unity between the working class and the middle classes, which is the Popular Front proper. With regard to the first stage, it seems reasonably clear that it was decided by the Comintern as a whole, after about three years of heated discussions both among CI leaders and the leaders of various national parties. On the CI's side, Dimitrov, Manuilsky and Kuusinen were in favour of the new approach, whilst Bela Kun, Pianitsky and Lozovsky spoke against it. On the PCF's side, Thorez wavered for a while but eventually became the champion of 'unity at all costs' whilst Marty and Ferrat showed more reluctance than most. The debate was not about abstract principles but it took account of the swift changes both in the world situation and in the situation in each country, especially Germany and France. The fact that it was an international debate has led many western critics to assert with Daniel Brower that 'Communist policy was set in Moscow'.[5] But this is too sweeping a statement and consequently misleading. Geographically, Brower is of course right, but his political implication that the new policy was dictated by Russia's state interests is more debatable. One does not have to be a Communist in order to accept as at least plausible the Communist view that it was not so much a question of issuing directives to the alleged agents of a foreign power, but one of collectively working out a policy which took all factors into account, including the interests of the Soviet Union. The USSR was then regarded as the greatest asset of the world revolutionary movement, whose preservation mattered to all workers, and its interests were thought to coincide with those of the proletariat in every country. This Communist belief may have been mistaken and naive, but it was sincerely held. It did not make those who held it unthinking robots.

With regard to the Popular Front proper, Brower says nothing of Comintern pressure, but merely remarks that in France, 'within a few

weeks', the United Front tactics 'were widened to include other groups in French society'.[6] The great majority of western critics fail to make the necessary distinction between the United Front and the Popular Front, on the assumption that what applies to the one necessarily applies to the other, and nearly all of them rely heavily on the testimony of Albert Vassart, a one-time PCF delegate at the Comintern (1934–5) who left the party in 1939. He asserts categorically that the 'abrupt change' in 1934 'can be understood only by taking into account the requirements of USSR foreign policy at that time'.[7] The argument is based on the evidence of Comintern discussions concerning the need to reappraise the United Front and make it less narrow, but this is hardly proof that those who advocated such a course had nothing but 'the requirements of USSR foreign policy' in mind. Are we then to assume that those who showed reticence towards the new approach – who included Stalin himself[8] – were less concerned about those requirements? It seems safer to take the view that the rise of fascism led the Comintern to question the wisdom of its earlier stand towards social-democracy and that, as already suggested, the Nazi threat against the USSR was only one of the factors involved. For Nazism did not only threaten the Soviet Union, it was also a deadly menace against the working class and the left in all European countries. Vassart also fails to substantiate his statement that the Comintern was a 'tool' of the Soviet government and 'was at its service in advancing its foreign policy'.[9] Such an assessment oversimplifies the relationship between the Comintern and the Soviet government to the point of caricature. Actually, Comintern leaders were not infrequently at odds with one another, and on occasions, one or two of them stood up to Stalin. This happened in 1934, when Dimitrov, supported by Manuilsky, argued with Stalin over the need to revise the approach to social-democracy (for which Stalin was largely responsible) and met with stubborn resistance on his part.[10] In the end, Stalin was won over, but only to the concept of a broader United Front, not yet to the Popular Front idea. Neither he nor the rest of the Comintern took much notice of the suggestion, then tentatively advanced by Manuilsky (CPSU) and Bronkowsky (Polish CP), that an alliance with the non-proletarian strata should be considered,[11] for no directives to this effect were sent to any of the CI sections. One may also note in passing that Trotsky, who was certainly not biased in favour of Stalin's Comintern, once told one of his disciples that 'you cannot think of the Comintern as being merely an

instrument of Stalin's foreign policy' and that the PCF was 'not only an agency of Moscow'.[12]

The testimony of eye-witnesses, when available, is always interesting. D. Brower was able to consult some of them (former PCF members such as André Ferrat – a Politbureau member until 1936 – and P. L. Darnar – *L'Humanité*'s assistant editor from 1934 to 1939), and their reports strengthened his view that Moscow dictated the PCF's policies. What is somewhat disconcerting is that Brower took their statements at face value, never wondering whether their subsequent careers outside the party may not have coloured their opinions and their recollections. Is an eye-witness reliable only when he has left the CP? To assume this is to be guilty of the very fault that Communists are often accused of, not always without foundation, that of believing automatically those who are on your side. Among the other eye-witnesses Brower might have consulted, there was at least one man whose testimony could not simply be brushed aside. That was Georges Cogniot, still alive at the time, who had been the PCF delegate at the Comintern between 1936 and 1937, and had been active in the CI for a long time. He wrote in 1972 that it was pointless to try and find out who gave 'the order' to come out in favour of United Front 'at the top', for it was 'the collective working out of a policy . . . among Communists'[13] which eventually led to it. He also claimed that the political discussions which took place in the offices of the International involved the representatives of all CPs and that they were based on 'a lengthy study of the questions they had to examine'.[14] Naturally, Cogniot's assertions should not be taken at face value, any more than those of Vassart and others, but they have at least the advantage of providing inside information concerning the way in which Communists, the main actors in the drama, regarded the events in which they took part.

Another Communist eye-witness whose testimony is interesting and valuable is Giulio Ceretti, a close friend of Thorez. He describes a meeting which took place in October 1934 at which some CI leaders tried to discourage the PCF General Secretary from launching the Popular Front. Thorez himself briefly reports the incident in the 1960 edition of his autobiography, *Fils du Peuple*,[15] but he names no names and simply says that he refused to bow down. Ceretti, who was present at the meeting, gives more details. He says that on the morning of 24 October 1934, Thorez received Togliatti, Gottwald and the CI representative in France, Fried. Togliatti, speaking on the

CI's behalf, suggested that the PCF should display great caution before offering an alliance to the 'petty bourgeois' party, the Radicals, as these were unstable allies and one ought to wait for the mass movement to grow stronger before making any deals with them. According to Ceretti, Thorez got up and replied: 'It's too late! This evening at Nantes, on the occasion of the Radical-Socialist congress, I am going to launch the slogan of the Popular Front. I have already written my speech, and I am not going to leave out a single word.'[16] The sequel is even more interesting, for Togliatti later told Ceretti that he had really echoed Stalin's reservations, but had now realised that Thorez was right.[17]

In 1935, at the seventh CI congress, Dimitrov praised the PCF for having set 'an example to all the sections of the Comintern' and said that its experience and policies had 'helped to prepare the decisions of our congress'. As for Stalin, he finally endorsed the new policy, largely because he felt that it complemented the USSR's own efforts to stand up to Hitler, but the previous account shows that, far from dictating the policy to Thorez, he accepted it only at the last minute. One should not go to the extreme of saying that Thorez and the PCF 'dictated' the policy to Moscow, but the evidence shows that they played a pioneering role. As for Thorez's show of independence, it should not be exaggerated. He took a risk by siding with the Comintern minority (Manuilsky and Bronkowsky) who had dropped hints about a possible alliance with the middle strata, and furthermore, he worked out the details of the Popular Front in the light of the French situation, but at the same time, he must have felt pretty confident that he would get CI support in the end; otherwise, it is unlikely that he would have gone ahead. Complete independence from the Comintern was unthinkable at the time.

Rise and fall of the Popular Front

The Popular Front went through five phases – preparation (1933), formation (1934–5), victory (1936), conflicts (1936–8), and break-up (1938). The first phase was dominated by the Amsterdam–Pleyel Peace Movement and by the growth of the fascist threat abroad and at home. Abroad, Hitler became Chancellor of the Reich in 1933 and immediately revealed the nature of his regime by dissolving Parliament (1 February 1933), setting fire to the Reichstag (27 February), imprisoning Communists, Socialists and democrats, suppressing working-class parties, and placing the German economy on a war



footing. His most spectacular defeat happened at the Leipzig trial of Georgi Dimitrov, a Bulgarian Communist living in Berlin, whom the Nazis had tried to charge with the very crime they had committed – the burning of the Reichstag. Dimitrov used his trial to accuse his accusers. In France and elsewhere there were demonstrations to demand his release, and despite the SFIO's official aloofness, Socialists rubbed shoulders with Communists. Finally, when Dimitrov and his co-accused were acquitted for lack of evidence against them and allowed to leave Germany for the Soviet Union, many greeted this as the common victory of all anti-fascists. The trend towards unity was strengthened as a result.

In France itself, the effects of the crisis and repeated instances of corruption in high places (e.g. the Stavisky scandal)[18] were exploited by fascist leagues, sometimes referred to as 'factious leagues', to discredit the republican regime and advocate its replacement by a Hitler–Mussolini kind of system. One may argue about the extent to which these leagues were really 'fascist', but what is certain is that they were extremely right-wing, that they thrived on nationalistic and anti-semitic propaganda, and did not hide their admiration for Italy and Germany. The oldest of these leagues was the monarchist *Action Française*, whose leader, Charles Maurras, daily threatened to have the Jew Léon Blum put down like a dog. Next in importance was Colonel de la Rocque's *Croix de Feu*, which was made up of four different groups, all bound together by loyalty to 'The Chief' and by their belief that a military coup was needed in France. One of the groups was the *Volontaires Nationaux*, ex-servicemen who were impressed by the movement's military discipline. The other leagues were the *Jeunesses Patriotes* (mostly students, equipped with firearms and bludgeons), the *Francistes* (made up of *lumpen-proletariat* thugs), the *Solidarité Française*, the so-called *Fédération Nationale des Contribuables* (which put attacks on the Republic before the taxpayers' interests), and eventually, after 1936, Doriot's *Parti Populaire Français*. On 6 February 1934 the leagues staged a march on the Chamber of Deputies, with the ostensible aim of overthrowing the regime. They clashed with the police and were eventually driven off, but not before many had been killed and wounded on both sides. Daladier, who had called in the police, was described in the right-wing press as a *fusilleur*, and he resigned on the 7th.

The left's reply to the 6 February fascists was, first, to stage counter-demonstrations on the same day, at the joint call of the PCF

and ARAC. As demonstrators on both sides had taken up the slogan, 'Down with thieves', this led to a good deal of confusion. *L'Humanité*'s editorial of the 7th did not remove the confusion, for like the right-wing press, it called the Prime Minister a *fusilleur*. To make matters worse, when the SFIO offered to organise joint anti-fascist demonstrations with the PCF, the Communist paper reacted by saying that united action was indeed necessary, but claimed that it was hard to unite with those 'who torpedo strikes' and 'pave the way for fascism'. As for the party, it called for a big demonstration on 9 February, which all anti-fascists were urged to attend, although no specific invitation had been sent to any organisation. Despite a government ban, huge crowds answered the call, and among them members of the Socialist Youth Organisation. Barricades were erected and paving stones thrown at the police, not for the sake of provocation, but in self-defence. By midnight, when the fighting ceased, six people had been killed, hundreds wounded, and 1,200 people were arrested. The following day the SFIO paper, *Le Populaire*, described the event as the first working-class response to fascism. The most striking feature of 9 February was that it marked the beginning of grass-roots SFIO–PCF co-operation. The PCF leadership, although it issued a manifesto claiming credit for the CP alone, made the point that 'thousands of Socialist workers' had been present. In order to strengthen unity, the manifesto called on Communists to support the General Strike which the reformist CGT had called for the 12th and the SFIO demonstration on the same day. Both the strike and the demonstration were a big success. Four and a half million workers downed tools, and 150,000 people marched through the streets of Paris. They were led and addressed by SFIO leaders and PCF leaders, both of whom stressed the need for unity against fascism. They were greeted with punctuated shouts of '*Uni-té d'ac-tion*'. Popular unity thus preceded formal unity 'at the top'.

Historians are divided about the real significance of the 6 February 'coup'. On the non-Communist side, it is asserted that it was not 'a failed *coup d'état*' but a series of 'bawling shots, punctuated, alas, by firing shots',[19] and 'a street demonstration which history would have forgotten if it had not taken a tragic turn'.[20] Non-Communist historians also deny that the leagues were fascist and seriously intended to take power. On the Communist side, Claude Willard argues that French fascists were inevitably different from Italian and German fascists but shared the same basic views. He concedes that their

immediate aim on 6 February was not power for themselves but a more reactionary government which would pave the way for fascism, and adds that this indeed is what happened when Doumergue succeeded Daladier.[21] Without arbitrating between these two opposing points of view, one must note that 6 February was *seen* as a fascist coup by the left, rightly or wrongly, and it was this assessment which dictated popular response. Whether it was an over-estimation of the danger it is difficult to say. The fact remains that it was the most important factor laying the ground for the formation of the Popular Front.

Between February and July 1934 the trend towards unity grew to such an extent that neither the SFIO nor the PCF could ignore it. Longuet later remarked that to have done so would 'have condemned the SFIO to death'. For the PCF, too, the time had come to break decisively with the past and to come out of the ghetto by responding to the people's unitary mood. After long negotiations, the two parties finally signed a pact of united action on 27 July 1934. The aim was 'common action against fascism', and more specifically a campaign against the leagues, war preparations, the government's decree-laws, and fascist terror in Germany and Austria. The pact advocated joint meetings and street demonstrations, and pledged that each party would cease to attack the other. For the first time since Tours, the French working class was not split into two hostile camps, and it became possible seriously to contemplate the reunification of the two parties, 'organic unity' as it was called.

For the PCF, the aim went back to Thorez's 1932 slogan, 'A single class, a single trade union confederation, a single party'. Soon after the united action pact had been signed, in May 1935, a draft unity charter was submitted to the SFIO. Unlike other PCF actions of the period, it was intransigent, for in effect, it demanded the Socialists' political and ideological capitulation. In order to account for the party's toughness on this issue, three plausible hypotheses may be put forward. One is that the charter was intended as a propaganda document in the debate, which incidentally never got off the ground because of SFIO reluctance, between Communists and Socialists. However, it might have been more honest to offer it as such instead of issuing a take-it-or-leave-it ultimatum. A second explanation is the PCF's then belief that there was no room for a working-class party which was not Leninist, on the double assumption (since given up by French Communists) that differences in the labour movement

stemmed from conflicting ideologies rather than from disparate experiences and that socialism needed a one-party system. Finally, the PCF's intransigence may have been due to its increasing confidence that it was gaining ground at the SFIO's expense, especially among workers in the new and 'dynamic' industries.

Whatever our view about the PCF's seriousness on the issue of 'organic unity', there is no doubt that it earnestly wanted to extend the anti-fascist alliance to the middle classes.[22] Thorez put out feelers to this effect on the eve of the Radical congress and called upon 'Radical working people' to oppose 'the Front of reaction and fascism' and take part instead in 'the Popular Front for liberty, labour and peace'. (The definitive formulation was 'for bread, liberty and peace'.)[23] The congress rejected the appeal on the ground that the long-term aims of the two parties were diametrically opposed. The Socialists were not much warmer to the idea, arguing that Marxists should not conclude programmatic alliances with bourgeois parties. Although they still believed in the 'management of capitalism', they contended that this required limited state intervention and planning, which were, of course, anathema to the Radicals. For a few months, they indulged in the pleasure of lecturing their Communist rivals in socialist doctrine. What they failed to realise was that a new situation demanded a new approach and that the urgent need was to reach agreement on the *lowest* common denominator acceptable to all anti-fascists. The Communists who, in the 1920s, had talked of nothing but revolution, suddenly found themselves in the ironic position of telling reformists that revolution was not the issue. Unfortunately, their case did not go beyond the level of practical common sense, for they did not provide a full theoretical analysis of the link between the democratic stage of the struggle and the socialist stage. It is true that they often quoted Lenin's dictum that the struggle for democracy does not 'divert the proletariat from the socialist revolution', but they failed to work out a revolutionary strategy which was based either on the concept of *stages* (as advocated by Gramsci whose views were little known at the time) or on the concept of revolution as 'a process' (which is the case today), not even after Dimitrov, in his report to the seventh CI congress in 1935, had revived Lenin's advice that Communists should search out 'forms of transition or approach to the proletarian revolution'.

Despite their leaders' reluctance, the rank and file in both the SFIO and the Radical party wanted unity. The worsening of living conditions led to greater popular activity. Workers' strikes and



demonstrations, protest actions by the urban and rural middle strata, ex-servicemen's demands for a better deal, intellectuals' involvement in the fight against fascism and war, all these combined to create the Popular Front in practice before the political parties of the left got together to formalise it. The first cautious step was made during the May 1935 municipal elections. The PCF having announced that in the second ballot it would withdraw its candidates if a Socialist had a better chance of winning, the SFIO did the same towards Communists. The Radicals were reluctant to commit themselves as a matter of principle, but they allowed *ad hoc* electoral deals with other leftwingers. The elections brought gains to the three parties, especially the PCF which gained many municipalities, including twenty-seven in the Paris area. The right-wing press was the first to point out that the Popular Front, which it chose to call 'the Red Front', was now a reality. As for *L'Humanité* and *Le Populaire*, they particularly welcomed the election of Paul Rivet in Paris, a member of the recently formed Vigilance Committee of anti-fascist intellectuals and the joint candidate of the PCF, the SFIO and the Radicals. *L'Humanité* wrote that 'the Popular Front [had] routed the 6th February thieves', and *Le Populaire* that 'fascism [had] been defeated'. Soon afterwards the SFIO congress and the Radicals' executive agreed to become part of the Popular Front, although the former continued to demand more far-reaching measures than a middle-class party was likely to accept. The three parties issued a joint appeal to their supporters to attend the 14 July celebrations in Paris, and huge crowds answered the call. A solemn oath was taken by all the participants, pledging to remain united against home and foreign fascism. The Popular Front was officially born.

A month later, the seventh Comintern congress was held. Dimitrov, who made the main speech, welcomed the events in France, praised the PCF, and got the whole movement to adopt the building of a Popular Front as its new strategy. In France itself, two further developments completed the formation of the left-wing alliance. One was the merging of the CGT and the CGTU, which began in 1935 and was formalised in March 1936, an event which increased trade union membership from 900,000 (600,000 for the CGT and 300,000 for the CGTU) to nearly five million. The second one was the adoption in January 1936 of the Popular Front programme. Its first part concerned the 'defence of liberty' and included such measures as the dissolution of the leagues, the granting of union rights to all

workers, and the raising of the school leaving age to fourteen. The second part dealt with the 'defence of peace' and demanded controlled reduction of armaments and collective security. The third and last part was a series of 'economic demands', aimed at 'restoring purchasing power' (including unemployment benefits for all), improving 'the organisation of credit' (especially through the nationalisation of the Bank of France), and preventing financial corruption (including control of capital exports). Blum later commented that it was the first time in France 'that a coalition of parties stood before the electorate with a common programme' which they solemnly pledged to implement in full if returned to power.

It is worth noting that most of the measures in the Popular Front programme were PCF-inspired and that it was the PCF which had insisted that the overall aim should be to provide a left-wing government with the means to implement a 'progressive policy'. No wonder that the party's 8th congress, which opened on 22 January 1936, should have been seen by the delegates as a victory congress: if the PCF was born at Tours in 1920, it was at Villeurbanne in 1936 that it first emerged as a national force. The title of Thorez's main report was significant, *The unity of the French nation.* It was centred around the idea, never put forward before by the Communist party, that the whole of France could unite against 'the two hundred families' and against fascism. This approach went beyond the Popular Front alliance, for it contained in embryo the concept of the 'French Front' which the party was going to propose a few months later. The call for unity was not based on stereotyped clichés but on a detailed analysis of French realities, coupled with the refreshing assertion that a revolutionary party worth its salt had to display creative initiative. It was also at that congress that the PCF came up with the slogan, *Faire payer les riches*, which increased its popularity among the poor and the under-privileged.

In April–May 1936 the Popular Front scored a major electoral victory, for the left secured 378 seats at the General Election (346 in the old House) against 220 for the right. The main beneficiaries were the Communists, whose poll went up to 15.2 per cent (one and a half million votes) and whose seats increased from 12 to 72. The Socialists gained seats (49) but hardly any votes, whereas the Radicals lost half a million votes and 43 seats. The left majority in the Chamber was not matched by a majority in the country, as it had got only 46 per cent of the poll. What worked to its advantage was, first, the electoral system,



and secondly, the fact that electors had generally switched their votes to another left-winger at the second ballot, thus showing their desire for unity and also, in many cases, their new confidence in the Communists. For the PCF, the results were indeed 'an electoral bonanza'.[24] Its main gains were in the 'Red Belt' of Paris, in large urban centres, in the industrial north and in a number of rural areas. The Communist advance was due to the economic situation, the new mood ushered in by the Popular Front (which everyone knew the party had initiated), the effectively simple slogans used during the campaign (e.g. *Faire payer les riches*) and the fact that 'revolution was still a symbol of progress for many Frenchmen who had no desire for a revolutionary change'.[25] The PCF had not anticipated such an increase for itself, thirty-five to forty seats having been its most optimistic pre-election forecast. Moreover, it was surprised by the Radical losses, but there is no evidence that the surprise amounted to disappointment, as asserted by Brower[26] and Tiersky.[27] These two authors believe that Communists had hoped for a Radical Premier because the Radicals had a more pro-Soviet orientation than the SFIO, but this is to assume, without proof, that the only aim of the Popular Front for the PCF was friendly relations between France and the USSR. We are on safer grounds if we assume that the unexpected Communist advance and SFIO strength raised the issue of PCF ministerial participation in the Popular Front government with greater sharpness.

On the face of it, both these aspects should have encouraged the party to join the government, but when Léon Blum (who became Premier as the leader of the strongest party) asked Communists to do so, they declined the offer and preferred to pledge full support without actual participation. Thorez himself favoured participation, whilst his closest colleagues, Duclos and Frachon, were against it, but the impression he gives in his autobiography that 'the Political Bureau took a different view'[28] from his is misleading, because the party executive did not formally discuss the matter.[29] Whatever discussions took place must have been informal and concerned only the top leaders. The reasons for the Communist decision were complex and it is not very helpful to fall back on the Soviet *deus ex machina* and speak of a Moscow 'order'. If such a precise instruction had been sent by the Comintern, it is unlikely that Thorez would have ignored it. Actually, the thinking of both the CI and the PCF on this issue went through a number of stages. In the summer of 1934 the PCF began to

revise its long-standing approach to Parliament as a platform for revolutionaries and to envisage that a left-wing presence in the Chamber might help the introduction of 'progressive' legislation. Hence the unprecedented PCF pledge that it would support any 'democratic government' which fought fascism. There was no mention of actual participation at this early stage, but as soon as the Popular Front idea had been launched, the question was bound to be put to the party, especially by the SFIO, which summoned its rival to choose between 'structural reforms', which of course would have been rejected by the Radicals, and taking part in a 'bourgeois government', a stand which Communists and their forerunners, the socialist left, had repeatedly condemned in the past. The PCF's answer was to draw a distinction between a socialist government (then a remote possibility), a thoroughly 'bourgeois' government (which Communists could never support), and a new type of government, 'imposed by the masses', which could and should be supported. This mixture of boldness and caution was endorsed by the Comintern.

In August 1935 at the seventh CI congress, the possibility of Communist participation in a Popular Front government was guardedly mentioned.[30] In his opening speech, Dimitrov asserted that if such a government was formed 'under conditions of political crisis' (one of which was said to be that the 'state apparatus' had become 'paralysed'), Communists should definitely support it and might even join it. He was careful to stress that the issue had to be settled in the light of an 'actual situation' and that 'no ready-made recipes could be prescribed in advance'. Thorez spoke in the same vein, and on his return to France, he went further and said that just as the CI had gone beyond the PCF's policy of the preceding period, the PCF, in turn, could 'creatively' go beyond the CI congress. In October 1935 he publicly pledged: 'We are ready to assume our responsibilities in a Popular Front government.'[31] Shortly afterwards, both the CI and the PCF grew apprehensive concerning the 'risks' involved, the CI because it was not sure the French party was strong enough to stand up to its partners in a predominantly non-Communist government, and the PCF because it feared that its presence in the government might frighten the middle classes. The result was that during the election campaign the party stated that it would support a Popular Front cabinet, but would not join it.[32] In the light of these facts it is difficult to speak of Comintern pressure pure and simple. There were misgivings and hesitations in the whole Communist movement, and

these were reflected in the PCF's changing tactics. One must add that the party leadership soon regretted its decision to stay outside the government, which to this day is regarded as having been a 'mistake'. We shall see presently that, subsequently, the party made two offers to join a Blum government, but the offers were turned down.[33] There is no evidence that these PCF moves were discouraged by the CI; in any case, the latter's position also evolved, since in the summer of 1936 two Spanish Communists were allowed to enter the *Frente Popular* government headed by the Socialist Largo Caballero.

A little before the Blum government took office, and whilst it was being formed, France was swept by a wave of strikes, involving millions of workers, some of whom were not even unionised, and factory occupations. A full account of these strikes has yet to be provided, but it is safe to assume that they had economic causes (low wages and poor conditions), political ones (for a month, the country had no effective government because the PM had resigned but Blum would not take office before he was legally entitled to do so) and psychological ones (the strikes were a show of strength, encouraged by the left's electoral victory). The strikers' attitude to the Popular Front government was not hostile, as was sometimes suggested by Blum and even by some PCF leaders (e.g. Ferrat); they were rather keen to stimulate the government and force the employers' hand.[34] As for factory occupations, which were then quite new,[35] they were not intended as a form of expropriation, but as a way of ensuring 'that the factories should not be kept working with the aid of blackleg labour'.[36] One must also mention the fact that occupations gave workers a chance to assert their dignity at the point where it was most often denigrated and of showing that they could organise themselves without being ordered about. Simone Weil, who took part in the movement, wrote at the time:

> This strike is in itself a joy. . . . Joy to enter the factory with the smiling permission of a worker on guard . . . Joy to hear instead of the merciless din of the machines, the sound of music, songs and laughter . . . Joy to pass before the bosses with your head held high . . . At long last, for the first time, and for ever, there will be other memories around these machines than silence, compulsion, submissiveness. Memories that will bring some pride to one's heart, that will leave a little human warmth on all this metal.[37]

The evidence at our disposal suggests that the strikes were largely spontaneous and that the PCF was no less surprised than other

parties. However it alone was able to play a key role and extend its influence as a result because it had always advocated 'mass action'. It immediately expressed its 'fraternal sympathy' to the strikers and told the government that the best way to end the strikes was to 'satisfy the demands of the working class'. At the same time, the party was anxious that the strike movement should not become 'wild' and alienate the rest of the population, thus jeopardising the precarious alliance that had just been built. On 11 June 1936, following the employers' concessions, Thorez said that it was important to learn how to end a strike.[38] Going beyond the well-known argument that workers should always be ready to accept compromises when all or most of their demands had been met, he stressed that this was especially important now, in order not 'to break the cohesiveness of the masses, the cohesiveness of the Popular Front'. Replying in advance to predictable *gauchiste* charges of 'sell-out', he added: 'As far as we are concerned, we do not gamble with the working class, we are not a handful of irresponsible people, we are great party, . . . the party on which all the hopes of the people of our country converge . . .' This statement came a few days after the successful negotiations among the government, the employers and the CGT at the Hotel Matignon on 7 June. The Matignon agreements provided for a forty-hour week, a fortnight's paid holidays (for the very first time in the country's history), collective bargaining, and wage rises. The paid holidays were perhaps the biggest novelty. They enabled many working-class families to enjoy seaside and other resorts which they had not known before, and French roads were filled with tandems (the cheapest form of transport), ridden mostly by singing, cheerful young people.

The Popular Front victory emboldened the PCF to try and extend the alliance still further, and on 6 August 1936 Thorez advocated the formation of a *Front Français*, based on the Popular Front, but including social groups and parties which agreed with the left on three issues only – the defence of 'republican laws', including the Matignon agreements, which incidentally were ratified by a huge parliamentary majority, much broader than the left; the 'defence of the national economy', including measures favourable to the peasants and the middle classes and steps to prevent 'sabotage' by some selfish industrialists; and the defence of France's freedom and independence through a foreign policy committed to peace and collective security. 'On these three points,' the PCF leader asserted, 'we can reach agreement with those who do not approve of the whole Popular Front

programme, even if they do not give up all their views'. The formation of a French Front might have cut across artificial party barriers and generated enthusiasm for limited but much-needed reforms. The critics who see 'the hand of Moscow' behind the PCF's initiative, on the ground that the USSR needed a united France to resist Hitler, probably overlook two facts. One is that the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July 1936 had clearly shown that a government relying on roughly one half of the population against the other lacked stability; the other is that a French Front might have saved the Popular Front in France and strengthened the country's international position. Daniel Brower, who is not generally favourable to the PCF, believes that the party's attitude stemmed from genuine concern 'with the internal divisions of France',[39] and he adds that 'The French parliament was a house divided, and there was little the Communist party could do to overcome the divisions'.[40] The SFIO in particular flatly refused to have anything to do with a French Front and resorted to 'revolutionary' arguments to justify its stand. In September 1936, the PCF reluctantly withdrew its offer, at any rate in so many words. It told its Socialist partners that it would 'refrain from using the phrase, *Front Français*' (9 September 1936).

The two main areas of conflict within the Popular Front alliance were in the fields of foreign policy and financial policy. The first one was overshadowed by the Spanish civil war, which broke out on 18 July 1936, when right-wing generals, led by Franco, resorted to armed insurrection against the *Frente Popular* government which had been formed in February. The republican government tried to buy arms from friendly democratic countries and expected that France in particular would respond favourably, partly because of her treaty obligations to Spain, and partly because she had a left-wing government. However, Blum refused to help. Privately, he would have liked to do so, but he was afraid of being disavowed by the British National government, which disliked the *Frente Popular* (a bunch of lefties!) and was anxious not to provide a pretext for Hitler and Mussolini to intervene on Franco's side. Anthony Eden warned Blum that Britain would not assist France if she were attacked as a result of her Spanish involvement, as this would not be a case of 'unprovoked attack' such as had been envisaged in the Franco–British treaty. What Eden came up with was that all states should join in a Non-Intervention Committee, and Blum, reluctantly or otherwise, supported him. The only trouble with Eden's proposal was that Italy and Ger-

many ostensibly agreed to it but got round it by sending Franco large numbers of so-called 'volunteers'. Thus, non-intervention turned into a tragic farce. As for the USSR, it decided at first to join the Non-Intervention Committee, probably as a diplomatic manoeuvre, for it could hardly have expected that the fascist powers would honour their pledge. French Communists defended its action out of 'internationalism', but many of them were puzzled. Others on the left spoke of a stab in the back of the Spanish republic. However, when evidence that the fascist dictators were sending large supplies of tanks and aircraft as well as whole battalions to the Spanish rebels became plain for all to see, Stalin revised his previous stand and said that his country would provide the Republicans with military assistance, adding that their cause was 'the common cause of all advanced and progressive mankind'.

Initially, the PCF's public reaction to the Spanish events was one of caution, a probable reflection of Soviet caution, but the party soon came out, not against the principle of non-intervention, but against the way it was supposedly applied. Its main charge was in fact that Britain and France were turning a blind eye to the real intervention of Italy and Germany. Together with others on the left, it organised public meetings which demanded 'Arms for Spain' and 'Planes for Spain'. On 25 August 1936, at one such meeting, Thorez said, 'Yes, we are in favour of non-intervention, . . . but we are also against the blockade inflicted on Republican Spain'. Aid for Spain was not only presented as a duty for the left but as a measure demanded by France's security against foreign attack. As for the *Entente Cordiale* with Britain, the party supported it, like the rest of the left,[41] and did not urge a break with the British government over Spain; it did however claim that an independent policy on Blum's part would not lead to such a break on the somewhat naive assumption that Labour pressure could alter the National government's stand. In addition to demanding governmental assistance to Spain, the PCF played a leading role in the setting up of the International Brigades, volunteers from fifty-four nations who went to Spain to fight on the republican side. Two Politbureau members, Marty and Billoux, left their posts to join the Brigades; many rank-and-filers, among them future Resistance members such as Tillon and Fabien, followed their example. The full story of the International Brigades cannot be told here. Neither can we enter the debate, which is still going on today, concerning the strained relations between Communists, on the one hand, and anar-

chists and Trotskyists, on the other. We should content ourselves with noting that there was intolerance on both sides, as the Communists wanted a broad alliance against Franco, whereas their ultra-left critics thought the civil war should be the prelude to a socialist revolution. As far as the PCF was concerned, apart from taking on responsibility for organising the passage of volunteers through France (about which the authorities were decidedly uncooperative), it decided to abstain in the December 1936 foreign policy debate in Parliament in order to show its opposition to the government's Spanish policy and yet at the same time its reluctance to break the Popular Front Alliance.

This alliance ran into greater difficulties because of its partners' conflicting views with regard to financial policy. The PCF slogan, *Faire payer les riches*, was dismissed by Blum because he did not think his government was strong enough to stand up to the so-called *Mur d'Argent*, i.e. the combined forces of French finance and industry. He feared that a head-on collision with them would lose him Radical support and frighten small investors. In order to check the massive export of capital (which had reached 40 billion francs by the autumn of 1936), he decided, first, to devalue the franc (September 1936), and then to proclaim a 'pause' in the government's reforms (February 1937). The devaluation almost nullified the wage increases gained by the Matignon agreements, but it was welcomed by a section of the bourgeoisie as it enabled French exporters to undercut their competitors in the world market. The PCF criticised the move, but for the sake of unity, its MPs voted for the government. The 'pause' implied that fiscal reform, checking the export of capital, and a series of social improvements to help the aged and the poor, were shelved 'for the time being'. This was intended to pacify the bankers and the industrialists, but it did nothing of the sort, and Blum's enemies continued to attack him on the economic front. The PCF replied to the 'pause' by saying that there should indeed be one, but against 'the trusts', not against the working people. It put forward an alternative economic policy, which included the taxing of big fortunes, measures against speculation, and the nationalisation of all *de facto* monopolies. (Ironically, it was the Socialists who had insisted on nationalisations during the talks on the Popular Front programme, and the Communists, supported by the Radicals, who had combated them.)

The employers' hostility to the Popular Front was not only economic. Some of them began to issue such slogans as 'Better Hitler

than Blum'[42] and to make lavish donations to the fascist leagues, with one of their representatives openly stating that they had 'no intention of participating in the classic parliamentary game, because the driving force for the action [lay] outside Parliament'.[43] Officially, the leagues had been dissolved by the government, but the *Croix de Feu* reconstituted itself as a political party, the *Parti Social Français* (PSF), and a clandestine body, the *Cagoule* (The Hooded Men), came into being, although its existence was not revealed before the end of 1937. The *Cagoulards* were organised on military lines and resorted to acts of terrorism. The formation of the PSF gave rise to a bloody incident in March 1937. The new party held a meeting in the Parisian working-class suburb of Clichy, but the local Popular Front committee staged a counter-demonstration. The police opened fire on the demonstrators, seven of whom were killed, whilst many others were wounded. The PCF demanded the resignation of Dormoy, the Home Minister, and Thorez even called Blum 'the murderer of Clichy workers'. It was the first serious rift in the alliance, despite the fact that Duclos spoke of 'our comrade, Léon Blum' when he recalled that it was he who had described the PSF as 'nothing but the reconstituted *Croix de Feu*'.

In June 1937 the flight of capital reached 60 billion francs, and Blum then felt compelled to demand from Parliament full powers to deal with the situation. He was supported by the Chamber of deputies, but not by the Senate, in which there was a right-wing majority, which voted against him by 196 votes to 168. Blum accepted defeat and resigned, despite a PCF appeal not to do so, coupled with the offer of Communist ministerial participation in order to strengthen his hand. Blum was succeeded by a Radical, Chautemps, whose government lasted until January 1938. When it fell because the Socialists had refused further capitulation to the banks, the PCF declared itself ready to enter either a broad government 'from Thorez to Paul Reynaud'[44] or a strictly Popular Front government. In the end, it was Chautemps again who formed a predominantly Radical government. As he pledged implementation of the Popular Front programme, the PCF voted for it. On the other hand, the right wing also voted for it, probably reassured by its moderate composition. Such hollow unanimity proved that despite the PCF's proclaimed belief that the Popular Front lived on, it had in fact begun to break up. Why the party refused to acknowledge this unpalatable reality can only be explained by its hope that the trend could be reversed. In this, it was deeply mistaken. In fact, Chautemps resigned in March, was followed

by Blum (he again refused PCF participation) who lasted until April, and finally, Daladier took over. It was under the Radical premiership of Daladier that the official end of the Popular Front occurred (October 1938).

This final break-up was caused by the foreign policy developments which led to the Munich agreement of September 1938. The Munich conference was attended by Chamberlain, Daladier, Hitler and Mussolini, and it ended with Britain and France condoning the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, which had been demanded by Hitler on 'ethnic grounds'. It was the climax of the policy of 'appeasement', i.e. of concessions to the fascist dictators in the proclaimed hope that such a course would avert war. According to the PCF, this proclaimed hope was only a facade, for the real aim was to give Hitler a free hand in the east so that he could attack the Soviet Union. The latter had been a notable absentee at Munich. It was hatred of 'the socialist Soviet Union', the PCF declared, which had led the Anglo–French ruling classes to support Hitler, and in the case of the French bourgeoisie, hatred of the Popular Front. How else could one account for a policy which threatened France's security, the party demanded? How else, it went on, could one explain the leniency towards the *Cagoulards*, who were released after a few months in jail, and towards such 'fifth columnists'[45] as the members of the *Comité France–Allemagne* who were on good terms with Otto Abetz, the Nazi diplomat suspected of being a spy? For the PCF, Munich was 'a triumph of class selfishness', as its spokesman on foreign affairs, Gabriel Péri, publicly declared. The same Péri indicted the government in the post-Munich debate in Parliament and asserted that 'appeasement' had not saved peace. 'Peace', he said, 'has to be regained . . . It is against you that we shall win the battle for peace.' However, apart from the seventy-three Communist MPs and only two others (the nationalist Henri de Kérillis, and the Socialist Jean Bouhey), the whole Chamber endorsed Daladier's policy.

Shortly after the parliamentary debate, the Radical executive met on 12 October and claimed that by voting against Munich, the PCF had 'deliberately withdrawn from the political formation to which it never ceases to proclaim its attachment'. At the end of October the Radical congress voted almost unanimously for a resolution which stated that the Radicals no longer belonged to the Popular Front. Despite Blum's confidence that the latter 'lived on', this was the end. In November the CGT called for a twenty-four-hour strike against

the government's anti-social decree laws and was supported by the PCF. The government tried to break the strike, claiming that it was politically motivated and even insurrectionary. In December the French Foreign Minister, Bonnet, met his German opposite number, von Ribbentrop. They signed a Declaration of Friendship between the two countries. The PCF later made much use of a conversation between Bonnet and the German ambassador, in the course of which the French statesman had said that in case of war, 'elections would be suspended . . . and the Communists would be brought to book'.[46] The PCF interpretation was that Bonnet had not tried to frighten Hitler but to reassure him. As for the German ambassador, he cryptically referred to 'the present admirable attitude of the French people'.

During the last stages of the Popular Front, the PCF tried to prevent its collapse, not only by issuing protests, but also by putting forward a comprehensive alternative policy, what Thorez in November 1938 called 'a genuine plan of national economic, social and moral recovery'. A programme for economic recovery was introduced by Duclos at the January 1939 PCF national conference. He recalled that the Popular Front programme, if it had been implemented, would have checked the flight of capital, prevented financial fraud, and 'saved our country many difficulties'. What was needed now, he added, was maintenance of the social gains already made, steps to protect the family, the return of capital already exported so that it could be invested to finance public works schemes, control of the trusts, the nationalisation of *de facto* monopolies, a tax on wealth and profits, and a thorough reform of public finances. On the issue of nationalisation, although the PCF thought that Radical objections had lost some of their relevance, Duclos was careful to recall that as early as 1907, the Radicals themselves had come out in favour of the nationalisation of monopolies, calling it 'a monopoly in the hands of the nation'. In order to achieve all these aims, a new government was needed, one that the PCF would definitely join. The concept of the party as 'a party of government' thus emerged for the first time. It was to reappear time and again in the party's history.

A brief assessment of the Popular Front policy launched by the PCF must include its achievements, its weaknesses and its importance for the party. The achievements were socio-political, cultural and psychological. The first include the Matignon agreements, some of which proved to be irreversible (e.g. collective bargaining, and the paid holidays which even the Vichy regime dared not take away), the

nationalisation of the Bank of France, the Grain Board (which regulated the price of agricultural products), improved living standards, and according to the PCF, the fact that fascism did not win in France, as it had done in Italy and Germany. Non-Communists who believe that there never was a real fascist threat in France naturally do not agree with the PCF on this issue. However, few would dispute its last claim that the Popular Front led to a cultural renaissance. *Maisons de la culture*, cultural centres where ordinary people and intellectuals met, hostels and leisure centres which were also cultural in the broadest sense, the extension of sports facilities, and the end of a virtual right-wing monopoly in the field of cultural periodicals, illustrated by the appearance of *Vendredi* (which published articles by Gide and Romain Rolland), these were some of the more striking features of the period. To this, one must add the novels of Malraux and Aragon, the paintings of Picasso (especially the famous *Guernica*, which exposed the fascists' brutality), and Renoir's films, such as *La Grande Illusion* and *La Marseillaise*. Finally, the PCF itself founded its own *Université Ouvrière*, now re-named *Université Nouvelle*, and published periodicals such as *Commune* (directed by Aragon and Nizan) and *La Pensée*. It is equally difficult to deny that, psychologically, the Popular Front period was experienced by many as one of joy and confidence. Léon Blum later referred to it as '*une embellie*' (a break in the weather) and Duclos in his Memoirs called it '*les jours ensoleillés du Front Populaire*'.

In the PCF's view, the chief weakness of the Popular Front is that it remained an alliance 'at the top', for the SFIO and the Radicals fought against the formation of broadly-based Popular Front committees. Brower notes that 'Communist efforts to build up a mass political movement . . . brought little success'.[47] But perhaps the party could have fought harder on this issue. At the seventh CI congress, Dimitrov had warned that 'the danger of right opportunism [would] increase in proportion as the wide united front developed'. It may be unfair to charge the PCF with 'opportunism', one of the worst sins in the Communist calendar, but leaving Communist jargon aside, it is true that it was guilty of over-optimism. Moreover, today's PCF commentators feel that the idea of popular committees, following agreements at the top, might have been suitable at the time, but that it fostered the illusion that the mass movement should follow the leaders instead of preceding their decisions. We shall have more to say about this in the final chapters.

Another weakness, according to both Communists and non-Communists, was the disunity of the French left. It is neither easy nor profitable to indulge in the game of finding the culprits for this state of affairs, but one must agree with Brower that 'in the first few months of the Popular Front government, the Communist deputies fully co-operated in the coalition'.[48] On one issue, however, Communist intransigence was an obstacle to closer unity, and that was the PCF's aggressive defence of the Soviet Union, especially the endorsement of Stalinist purges, even if it was done in good faith in the belief that the aim was to crush the counter-revolution. It was not only that French Communists echoed *Pravda* and *Izvestia*, but that the language they used to defend the indefensible was almost hysterical, which was not conducive to narrowing the gap between them and those who regarded them with suspicion. Admittedly, Stalin's foreign policy was anti-fascist, admittedly anti-Soviet criticisms were often as unbalanced as the PCF's propaganda,[49] but these facts can only constitute partial excuses.

One must also examine the argument that the Popular Front was a failure. That it finally collapsed is a fact, but it is also a fact that it left its mark. A more sophisticated variant of the 'failure' argument is that the Popular Front was a 'failed revolution'. This is the Trotskyist thesis. The PCF reply is based on what Marxists call an 'analysis of the balance of class forces', or in plainer terms, an assessment of who was stronger than whom. Recalling Lenin's description of a 'revolutionary situation' as one in which those who are ruled *do not want* the old and those who rule *cannot* continue in the old way, the party claims that neither condition was fulfilled in 1936–8 France. First, it points out that factory occupations had not been a form of instant socialism (in fact, the employers' property was scrupulously respected) but a way of stopping blackleg labour. Secondly, the peasants and the middle strata, without whose support or at least 'benevolent neutrality' a socialist revolution is impossible, were certainly not in a revolutionary mood. Actually, many of them were showing signs of anxiety about the strikes, even when they were 'progressive' enough to write to the PCF General Secretary. Thorez mentioned a telegram which he had received from peasants who were worried that the lorry drivers' strike might last so long that their cherries would go bad before they could be sold. What was ripe in their view was not the revolution but the cherries! Incidentally, a Trotskyist historian, Tom Kemp, admitted in 1970 that 'under the

influence of the strikes . . . the middle class moved to the right'.[50] French Communists claim that they were aware of this at the time and they further add that it is, as Lenin said, a form of 'Blanquism' to attempt a revolution if the party 'does not enjoy the sympathy of the majority of the people, as proved by definite facts'. According to the PCF, 'definite facts' was just what Trotskyists had failed to produce. Finally, the PCF argues that the employers, far from being unable to 'continue in the old way', challenged the Popular Front in countless ways, that the army and the police were on the side of 'law and order', not revolution, as was shown when they fired on the peaceful Clichy demonstrators, that La Rocque had 300,000 supporters trained for civil war by army officers, and finally that Germany and Italy, probably backed by Britain, would have intervened to prevent a proletarian revolution in France. Whatever one may think of the PCF's arguments, and irrespective of whether Stalin did really issue secret instructions to his 'henchmen' to avoid social unrest in France, the evidence at the historian's disposal tends to suggest that it is most unlikely that a revolutionary attempt would have succeeded. One must also remember that even at the height of the Popular Front, the bulk of the peasantry, the middle strata and the intellectuals did not fully accept the lead of the working class, that despite formal unity, the trade union movement was still split between reformists and revolutionaries, and finally that the PCF itself had begun to lose some of its credibility by its uncompromising defence of Stalinist purges.

The Popular Front was the PCF's first major initiative. Even a critic such as Brower, who believes that the party leaders were at first 'bureaucrats whose sole duty was to execute orders',[51] concedes that 'they showed real improvement in their political capacity a year later' and that 'the Communist party had finally made the French republican tradition its own'.[52] He concludes his study by saying that 'The Popular Front brought together communism and the Third Republic and created a new Jacobinism'.[53] The same claim was made by the PCF itself when it held its ninth congress in December 1937. Thorez recalled Lenin's description of the Bolsheviks as 'the Jacobins of the proletarian revolution' and added that the PCF was continuing the French Jacobin tradition. Despite the fact that serious problems had already arisen for the left-wing alliance, the keynote was that the Popular Front had opened up a new era. The party was proud of its contribution, and in many ways, the ninth congress was 'a happy congress'.[54] It could boast of a spectacular increase in party member-

ship, from 30,000 in 1931 to 81,000 in 1935, 285,000 in 1936 and 340,000 in 1937. It could also boast of closer links with the people, due largely to its new approach, but also to the organisational changes adopted at the previous congress, such as the replacement of large *rayons* by smaller *sections* playing an active role in the localities. Party propaganda had become less aggressive, less stereotyped, and party members had become, in the words of Thorez, 'men and women with greater ability, and also warmer, more generous hearts'. The Popular Front was the first great 'mutation' of French communism. It was destined to be followed by others, but until the 1976 congress, none perhaps was as deep and as thorough.

Notes

1 The phrase was widely used and was intended to describe the 200 largest shareholders of the Bank of France, i.e. the country's real rulers.
2 A good deal of the blame must also go to the Social-democrats, as they were equally unwilling to co-operate with the Communists.
equally unwilling to co-operate with the Communists.
3 A. Cobban, *A History of Modern France*, vol. 3 (Penguin, 1965), p. 146.
4 M. Thorez, speech at the 9th PCF congress (1937).
5 D. Brower, *The New Jacobins* (Cornell UP, 1968), p. ix.
6 *Ibid.*, p. 68.
7 A. & C. Vassart, 'The Moscow origin of the French "Popular Front" ', in *The Comintern: Historical Highlights* (essays edited by M. Drachkovitch & B. Lazitch, Praeger, New York, 1966), p. 235. The article was written by Vassart's wife on the basis of notes left by her husband before he died in 1958.
8 Cf. Jean Mérot, *Dimitrov, un révolutionnaire de notre temps* (Editions Sociales, 1972), p. 185. Mérot reports that he was told by a Bulgarian historian that the party archives show that Stalin was at first unconvinced by Dimitrov's arguments in favour of a revised approach to the United Front.
9 A. & C. Vassart, *op. cit.*, p. 236.
10 Cf. J. Mérot, *op. cit.*, pp. 184–7.
11 Cf. *Outline History of the Communist International* (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1971), p. 359.
12 Private interview given in April 1939, reported in *Writings of Leon Trotsky, 1938–39*, Merit, 1969, p. 62.
13 G. Cogniot, *Parti Communiste Français et Internationale Communiste*, in *Le Front Populaire* (Editions Sociales, 1972), p. 124.
14 *Ibid.*, p. 137.
15 Cf. M. Thorez, *Fils du Peuple* (Editions Sociales, 1960), p. 102.
16 Ceretti, *op. cit.*, p. 159.
17 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 161–2.



18 Stavisky was a financial crook who ruined many small investors before he committed suicide. He had links with government circles.
19 Fauvet, *op. cit.*, p. 121.
20 René Rémond, *La Droite en France* (Aubier, 1963), p. 217.
21 Cf. C. Willard, 'Prologue au Front Populaire', in *Le Front Populaire* (Editions Sociales, 1972), pp. 23–5.
22 Although the phrase *Front Populaire* was first used by Thorez on 24 October 1934, a fortnight earlier, he had told a joint meeting of Socialists and Communists that their United Action pact should be extended in order 'to attract new forces' (9 October 1934), and he repeated his point at a Salle Bullier public meeting, urging the formation of a '*vaste rassemblement populaire*' which would 'seal the alliance between the middle classes and the working class . . . for bread, liberty and peace' (10 October 1934).
23 The slight variations before the definitive formulation are only of mild historical interest. According to Brower (*op. cit.*, p. 75), Thorez had first suggested 'Common Front', and it was Fried who came up with 'Popular Front'. Whatever the initial semantic gropings of its authors, the movement has its place in history as 'the Popular Front for bread, liberty and peace'.
24 D. Brower, *op. cit.*, p. 138.
25 *Ibid.*, p. 136.
26 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 138.
27 Cf. R. Tiersky, *op. cit.*, p. 77.
28 M. Thorez, *op. cit.*, p. 121.
29 Cf. F. Billoux, *Quand nous étions ministres* (Editions Sociales, 1972), pp. 17–18.
30 The International's flexibility – or hesitancy – was reflected in the fact that it sometimes spoke of a 'United Front government', sometimes of an 'anti-fascist government', and sometimes of a 'Popular Front government'.
31 M. Thorez, reported in *L'Humanité*, 18 October 1935.
32 For a fuller discussion of this issue, cf. Serge Wolikow, 'Le PCF et la question de sa participation au gouvernment de Front Populaire', in *Cahiers d'Histoire de l'Institut Maurice Thorez*, no. 34 (1980), pp. 55–106.
33 Cf., p. 82.
34 G. D. H. Cole wrote at the time: 'The affair was greatly to the government's advantage. It scared the right and stimulated the left' (G. D. H. Cole, *The People's Front* (V. Gollancz, 1936), p. 111).
35 They had been tried by Italian workers in 1920, but never before in France.
36 G. D. H. Cole, *op. cit.*, p. 111.
37 Simone Weil, in *La Révolution Prolétarienne*, 10 May 1936.
38 In 1932, Thorez had already said that 'to learn how to end a strike may be more important than to learn how to start it' (quoted in *Le PCF, Etapes et Problèmes*, p. 120).
39 D. Brower, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 162.

41 In those days the French right wing was virulently anti-British, and one of its journalists, writing in *Gringoire*, even suggested that England should be 'reduced to slavery'.

42 Cf. A. Cobban, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

43 Gignoux, speaking on behalf of the *Comité des Forges* in June 1936.

44 Paul Reynaud was known for his 'liberal' economic views. He entered Daladier's government in 1938, first as Justice minister, then in charge of Finance. On 12 November 1938, he issued decree-laws abolishing the forty-hour week in practice and reducing overtime payments. He was Prime Minister from March to June 1940.

45 The term 'fifth columnist' to designate a fascist agent originated in Spain: a fascist general remarked that Madrid was attacked by four outside columns and by a fifth one inside the city.

46 The full conversation is reported in the French Yellow Book.

47 D. Brower, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 156.

49 One example among many is André Gide, who switched from pro-communism to anti-sovietism and said that nowhere in the world, 'not even in Nazi Germany', was the human mind so enslaved as in the USSR.

50 Tom Kemp, 'Betrayals of 1936–37', in *Workers' Press*, 25 March 1970.

51 D. Brower, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

52 *Ibid.*

53 *Ibid.*, p. 247.

54 Fauvet, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

CHAPTER 4

Trials: the acid test of war (1939–45)

The 'pact' and the 'phoney war'

During the first eight months of 1939, the PCF tried unsuccessfully to revive the defunct Popular Front and the no less defunct Peace Front between the west and the USSR. Thorez's CC speech in May, significantly entitled 'Frenchmen, unite', was a plea for national unity against foreign fascism and 'internal reaction'. Blum had just moved a resolution at the SFIO congress, advocating the same kind of unity to defend both the republic and France's independence, and Thorez claimed: 'This is exactly the French Front which we proposed in July 1936.' Despite this apparent convergence, the SFIO congress forbade Socialists to work with Communists in 'United Front organisations'. Another aspect of Thorez's speech concerned the PCF's stand on national defence. The speaker asserted that it was the employers who were sabotaging war production, whereas workers were 'ready to accept the sacrifices which the defence of the country and the defence of peace demand', and he concluded by urging the formation of 'a genuine government of national defence'. But it was too late. The French government had unmistakably moved to the right, whilst Britain and France were at best lukewarm about co-operating with the Soviet Union in resisting Hitler.

On 21 August 1939 a bombshell exploded: Germany and the USSR announced their decision to conclude a pact of non-aggression, which was duly signed two days later by Molotov and Ribbentrop. The Soviet explanation (which one need not endorse, but which one needs to know in order to understand the PCF's policy) was that the Anglo–Franco–Soviet negotiations about a pact of mutual assistance had led nowhere, because the western governments, represented at the Moscow talks by minor officials who had no authority to sign important documents, had shown no real desire to reach agreement. For example, they had supported Poland's refusal to allow Soviet troops to pass through its territory to make contact with the enemy.

The Soviet government was therefore compelled to seek other ways of eliminating the war danger against its country, which is why it accepted Hitler's proposal for a Soviet–German non-aggression pact. Predictably, the Soviet version was endorsed by all CPs, but some western statesmen also felt with Lloyd George that the west had been 'trifling with a grave situation' by sending to Moscow 'a clerk in the Foreign Office'. Be that as it may, the controversy which ensued was not so much about the events which had led to the pact, but about its nature. In France the government maintained that it was a 'Hitler–Stalin alliance', whereas the PCF insisted that it was merely a pact of non-aggression. The public clauses of the treaty – the only ones which were known at the time – tended to confirm the party's assessment.[1] As for the secret clauses, they were revealed in 1948 only, and so could not have been used by either side in the discussion.[2]

French public opinion was flabbergasted by news of the pact, and the PCF was not exempt. Despite blind faith in Stalin, which for many Communists quickly overshadowed all other considerations, the party's immediate 'gut' reaction was one of shock and bewilderment. Ceretti, although he claims not to have lost his bearings, admits that 'dedicated comrades were left without a compass'.[3] For a day or two, the main leaders kept silent, and only minor figures were given the unenviable task of 'explaining' the pact. On 22 August, Marcel Gitton, a deputy who later defected, told *Ce Soir* that the USSR had 'compelled' Germany to sign the pact and that this was 'a victory for peace'. P. L. Darnar (who also defected later) wrote in *L'Humanité* of the following day that the French government should also sign a pact with the Soviet Union, adding that 'the plane for Moscow leaves every morning at 8 a.m., Monsieur Daladier'. When the party leadership broke its silence on the 25th, it was not only to justify the pact, seen as Stalin's revenge on Munich, but also to assert that 'if in spite of everything, Hitler unleashes war', he should know that 'a united French people' would resist him, 'with the Communists in the front line'. Thorez, who made that statement to the PCF deputies and released it to the press, added that his party supported the government's measures to guarantee France's frontiers and give assistance to Poland, and he repeated the point that an Anglo–Franco–Soviet alliance remained 'quite feasible and necessary'. The next day, *L'Humanité* reported the speech under the following headlines, 'Unity of the French nation against the Hitlerite aggressor' and 'The Moscow Pact provokes a split in the warmongers' bloc'. Such senti-

ments did not prevent the paper from being seized by the government and banned for an indefinite period, an action which was followed by the suppression of all Communist newspapers and the arrest of many Communist militants. In spite of this, the PCF continued to argue that support for the pact did not preclude supporting a defensive war against 'the Hitlerite aggressor', and on 2 September all its deputies voted for the military credits demanded by the government. The latter, however, took no notice and went on treating defence of the pact as 'defeatist' and soon after as 'treasonable'. On 26 September the PCF was declared illegal, and it had to go underground until August 1944. (At first, there were two leadership 'centres', one in Brussels, which included Fried and Duclos and which was in touch with the Comintern, and another one in Paris, which was headed by Frachon; eventually, the Brussels 'centre' ceased to exist.)

It was not only the government which pressed the PCF to condemn the pact, but also its former allies and many of its recent supporters, all of whom charged it with slavishly following Moscow. The charge was not quite correct, because although the party defended the pact by using the arguments provided by Soviet propaganda, it adopted a pre-war policy for nearly the whole of September, whilst the Soviet Union remained neutral. Yet it was in August that *L'Humanité* was banned and in September that the party was outlawed. The main charge against both of them – lack of patriotism – appeared so valid that it disturbed many outside sympathisers and an appreciable number of party members. The former included famous intellectuals such as Langevin and Joliot-Curie (who had not yet joined); they voiced their misgivings but did not openly attack the party. The latter were either people who, like Paul Nizan, resigned because they found themselves 'without a compass' (many rejoined or fought alongside the party during the Resistance), or individuals who could not face the prospect of repression. The twenty-seven deputies and the local councillors who publicly dissociated themselves from the party must have included people of both categories. Unfortunately, the PCF leadership branded them all as 'traitors'. One may perhaps understand this reaction when one recalls that the party was being hounded at the time, but it is hard to condone it.

On 3 September 1939 Britain and France declared war on Germany, but for the first eight months, 'the French and British armies . . . passively sat on the defensive waiting to be attacked'.[4] In the words of Fauvet, 'France is at war, but does not wage war . . . For

want of war against the foreign foe, the government wages war against the internal adversary.'[5] It was then that the nickname, *drôle de guerre*, was coined, the phrase having first been used by Roland Dorgelès in a newspaper article. Its English equivalent, 'phoney war', does not accurately convey its full meaning, for it merely implies that it was the wrong kind of war, without suggesting that something 'funny', in the sense of odd, was taking place, without conveying the sense of bewilderment which is implicit in *drôle de guerre*. The bewilderment was caused by many factors – the lack of military preparations, deemed unnecessary because we were 'going to hang our washing on the Siegfried line', and the Maginot line was impregnable; the presence in high circles of self-confessed admirers of Franco and Mussolini, two 'neutrals' who had at least as much justification for being considered as Hitler's allies as that other 'neutral', Stalin; the leniency towards *Cagoulards* and friends of Hitler, whilst Communists and militant trade unionists were being jailed; and, most serious of all, the fact that many French employers were at best half-hearted in their support for the war effort and that some of them continued to supply Germany with iron ore from Lorraine via Luxemburg. Whether in addition to being mystified and confused, French public opinion was also pacifist-inclined may be true, but the 'pacifism' was certainly encouraged by the government and the media.

The anti-Communist repression, which started with the banning of the party (described by Blum as 'natural and legitimate' but a 'mistake' all the same), was intensified. PCF deputies and senators were deprived of their seats, and PCF militants were expelled from the CGT. On 29 March 1940 Sarraut, who was now a minister and still thought that '*le communisme, voilà l'ennemi*', told the Upper House that 2,778 Communist councillors had been dismissed, that all Communist papers had been banned and all Communist printing plants closed down, that 629 trade unions under Communist leadership had been dissolved, and that so far 3,400 Communist militants had been arrested, whilst others were being 'tracked down'. In March and April, the trial of forty-four PCF deputies was held *in camera*. They were charged with having formed a Workers' and Peasants' Group in the Chamber after the banning of their party (which Herriot, as President of the Chamber, had assured them they were legally entitled to do), with having requested a debate on peace in Parliament, and with being connected with the Third International. All the accused

bar three (who announced their resignation from the party in court) claimed that they had done nothing illegal. Speaking on their behalf, François Billoux stated in a final speech: 'Neither the Communist deputies nor communism are on trial here. . . . We it was who, with the greatest zeal, exposed Hitlerism to the French public. . . . We don't want to be the slaves of Hitler, the vassals of Chamberlain, or the servants of Mussolini. . . . '[6] The accused were found guilty and were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. The climax of the anti-PCF drive came with the decree, signed on 10 April 1940 by the Socialist, Sérol, which made Communist propaganda punishable by death. A public protest was issued in Britain, bearing the signatures of twenty prominent figures, Shaw, Wells and Forster among them, which declared that 'the world cannot be saved from Nazism . . . by imitating the standards of that abhorrent regime'.

As an organisation which had been made illegal, the PCF was not in a strong position to answer its enemies. It did, however, manage to publicise its views, mostly by means of leaflets and *L'Humanité*, both of which were published underground. Its stand up to May 1940 went through two stages, one of support for the war, seen largely as a defensive war, and one of opposition to the war, described as being 'imperialist on both sides'. During the first stage, the party attacked the government not for waging the war but for not waging it properly, i.e. for not enlisting the support of the unions and the people and for not dealing internal fascism a death blow. During the second stage, the party's attitude was inconsistent, for, on the one hand, it continued to denounce 'the ruling class' for its readiness to sell the country down the river, and on the other, it demanded the end of the war and the conclusion of peace, coupled of course with alliance with the Soviet Union. The first sign of the new approach was a long CC statement, dated 21 September 1939, which was entitled *Il faut faire la paix* (We must make peace). After indicting the French government's pre-war policy of 'appeasement', it concluded that the urgent task was to make peace, arguing that the war 'imposed on the French people is *no longer* [my emphasis] an anti-fascist, anti-Hitler war' and that France could safeguard her security and her independence without war. The expression 'no longer' may perhaps be read as an attempt to justify the party's initial stand. The CC statement was followed by a letter, dated 1 October 1939, which the Workers' and Peasants' parliamentary group (i.e. the Communist deputies) sent to Edouard Herriot, the president of the Chamber of Deputies. The letter

referred to the 'peace offensive' which had been launched on 28 September by Germany and the Soviet Union[7] and advocated acceptance of the two countries' peace proposals by the French government. The only reason given was that Germany was 'rent by internal contradictions' (which were not glaringly obvious at that time!) and that thanks to the 'might of the USSR', there could be a return to collective security which would safeguard France's independence. Later in the same month, a PCF appeal appeared in the underground *L'Humanité*. It declared that 'Communists hate Hitler and the regime of anti-working class violence which he represents', but it failed to say what practical steps should be taken to defeat such a regime, and if it was silent on this issue, it was because the PCF leadership had really nothing to propose, apart from expressing its faith in the USSR and its confidence that the German people would in due course get rid of Hitler. In the meantime, the duty of French anti-fascists was deemed to be the denunciation of their own 'fascist' ruling class. An article, written by Thorez and published in *L'Humanité* on 25 April 1940, complained that French rulers, likened to Pitt and Cobourg,[8] 'only yesterday . . . looked on Hitler and Mussolini as *gendarmes* against the working-class movement in their own country'. The article reflected both the chief strength and the chief weakness of the PCF's propaganda: it had a strong case to offer with regard to the *past*, but it was not very helpful, to say the least, when it came to the *present*.

Moreover, the instructions given to PCF members who were called up became vague and even ambiguous after the party switched from a pro-war to a pro-peace stand. Initially, these instructions had been quite clear: Communists were expected to join their regiments and take part in the fighting. For example, Thorez told Aragon, 'You are going to be called up. Do your duty.'[9] Later, the instruction to stay in the army remained (because one had to be among the people), but the word 'fight' took on a different meaning, as can be seen from Thorez's article published in *L'Humanité* on 17 November 1939: 'The members of the Communist Party are fighting and will go on fighting . . . They are fighting with all their might against the imperialist war, for peace, and against the Daladier government.' As for the actual ways in which French Communists were expected to 'fight', they were not spelt out. Apart from written and oral propaganda, it is unlikely that sabotage was envisaged, either in the army or in the factories, and this for a number of reasons. First, it is hard to imagine the party asking its

own members to resort to the dismantling of national defence when it was accusing 'the two hundred families' of that very crime. Secondly, on two occasions,[10] *L'Humanité* denounced as 'provocations' the rumours that Communists contemplated desertion and sabotage. Finally, hardly any acts of sabotage by PCF members were ever reported.[11] A very hostile critic, A. Rossi, although he claims that the PCF's industrial activity included sabotage, is unable to give precise details, arguing that the relevant archives have not yet been released.[12] As for the February 1940 leaflet which he quotes, it does openly call for sabotage, but only to prevent war material being sent to Finland against the Soviet Union:[13] 'Workers, do not become accomplices of your worst enemies, who in attacking the Soviet Union are attacking the triumph of socialism over one sixth of the world; *by all apropriate means, . . . prevent, delay, and render useless all war material*.'[14] Whatever one might think of this appeal, it would be dishonest to use it as proof of the PCF's policy to sabotage war production *in the war against Hitler*. That war was regarded as 'imperialist on both sides', but the party never went beyond demanding an early peace. Calls for 'revolutionary defeatism' (Lenin's tactic during the first world war) were conspicuously absent. Instead, as the PCF historian, Roger Bourderon, remarks, *L'Humanité*'s calls for 'action' were mostly 'incantatory' and the paper's 'verbal vigour contrasted sharply with the extreme modesty of the concrete forms of struggle proposed'.[15] Every issue of the paper urged people to 'protest' on a variety of issues, but apart from advocating traditional forms of industrial struggle on economic issues, this was as far as it went.

The PCF's inability to put forward a concrete policy stemmed in the first place from its inability to provide a satisfactory assessment of the character of the war (to which we shall return), but it was also due to the fact that some of its ablest leaders were either in jail, or in hiding, or in the army. Maurice Thorez was among those who had been called up, but on 4 October 1939 he broke his own rule that Communists must stay in the army, and he deserted. Reporting the fact in his autobiography, he claims that he had been instructed by the party leadership to leave his regiment and resume his post at the head of the party. Ceretti confirms this and says that Thorez had to be specifically 'ordered' to desert despite his initial reluctance, partly because his life was in danger,[16] and partly because he was badly missed.[17] On 26 October the first issue of the underground *L'Humanité* asserted: 'No, Maurice Thorez is not a deserter. On the contrary,

he has taken up once more his fighting post, as instructed by his party, in the defence of the people.' On 17 November the paper carried the text of an interview given by Thorez to Sam Russell, the *Daily Worker* correspondent. To the question, 'What are you going to do now?, he replied, 'I'm going to continue the struggle with my comrades.' He naturally did not say where he was hiding. We now know that, after spending a few weeks in Belgium, he flew to Moscow at the end of November. He remained in the Soviet Union until November 1944, and there is no evidence whatever that he spent any time in Germany, as was asserted by his enemies.[18]

For the whole period during which the PCF was illegal (September 1939 to August 1944), the main source of information concerning its views and activities is *L'Humanité*, which reappeared as an underground newspaper as from October 1939. From then onwards, it came out about twice a week, sometimes more often.[19] It was edited by Jacques Duclos, who, together with Benoit Frachon, led the party from France. On special occasions, it was printed in Belgium, but generally it was stencilled. Forty-six issues appeared during the 'phoney war'. They all advocated 'action' against the ruling class, but as we have seen, seldom described that action in detail. It contented itself with general slogans, such as 'Arise against capitalism, against reaction and Hitlerism, against the war of profiteers and fascists!' (no. 1, 26 October 1939), with frequent appeals for 'unity' and 'struggle', and with no less frequent demands for the release of Communist deputies and the overthrow of 'the Daladier dictatorship'. How the latter could be achieved was not spelt out.

In addition, one could detect four main themes. The first one was a reminder that the party was alive and kicking, a reminder which was occasionally accompanied by grim humour: for example, the 16 November issue carried a report of a factory gate meeting at which the PCF speaker, after melting some sugar in a glass of water and making it reappear by heating the water with a petrol lamp, concluded: 'In the same way, ladies and gentlemen, the dissolution of the Communist Party has not made it vanish. It is still in its element, the working class, and it will lead it to victory.' People were asked to show their support for the party through letters, petitions, and all available legal channels. They were especially advised to remain in their unions and to form committees 'for the independence and unity of trade unions'.

The second theme was the denunciation of the French government, which was accused of 'paving the way for fascism' and even of being

itself 'fascist'. The second issue of the paper (simply dated October 1939) declared that Communists denied 'the men of Munich . . . the right to speak of anti-fascism at the very time when they are introducing fascist methods of oppression into France', and the fourth issue (13 November 1939) referred to 'the fascist government of France' and to the fact that 'fascism [is] in power in France'. On 18 January 1940 the paper compared France under Daladier with Germany under Hitler:

> '*As in Germany*, Daladier-the-war arrests the best sons of the people . . .
> *As in Germany*, those who do not think like the government are arrested . . .' (emphasis in the original)

In March 1940, when Reynaud succeeded Daladier as Prime Minister, *L'Humanité* continued to attack the government, but asserted that, unlike the deputies who had voted against it (about half the Chamber), it was headed by a man who wanted '*first*, to settle accounts with Germany, and *then* only, to attack the Soviet Union' (27 March 1940, emphasis in the original). A month later, when the minister, Sérol, issued his anti-Communist decree, the PCF organ exclaimed: 'Sérol Imitates the Gestapo' (10 April 1940). However, despite the claim that French Communists were against both German and French fascism, it was strongly suggested that bringing Hitler down was mainly the German Communists' responsibility, and that the best way their French comrades could assist them was by fighting against their own bourgeoisie: for example, the 9 May 1940 issue contained an article entitled, '*Salut aux Communistes Allemands*', which reported that the Nazis were worried by the spread of Communist propaganda in Germany, and then added: 'We know . . . that it is by fighting against our own bourgeoisie that we can support your own struggle against the German imperialist bourgeoisie and its Hitlerite rulers.'

The third theme was 'the war of the rich against the people'. The paper quoted facts and figures to prove that capitalists made profits, whilst the workers worked harder for less pay. The lengthening of the working week (seventy-two hours in some cases), the various decrees cutting wages, the rise of prices, and the discrepancy between the taxes imposed on the people and those demanded from the rich, were all bitterly attacked by *L'Humanité*, which wrote that the Popular Front gains had been destroyed by a ruling class which was bent on getting its revenge on 1936. As wartime conditions were indeed very harsh, this aspect of Communist propaganda was particularly

appreciated by workers, pensioners, housewives, by all those who found it difficult to make ends meet. Its comparatively ready acceptance by ordinary people made it a little easier for the party to 'sell' the idea that the war was not 'a people's war'.

The fourth theme was praise for the Soviet Union's 'socialist system' and 'peaceful policy', coupled with warnings that the Anglo-French rulers were trying to 'pass from stationary war in the west to active war on the USSR', as the 31 December issue put it. *L'Humanité* also attempted to rebut the charge that the Soviet Union had become Hitler's ally, claiming instead that 'it alone has dealt Hitler a series of harsh blows and barred the road to Hitlerism in White Russia, in the Baltic and the Black Sea' (13 November 1939). Finally, the paper warned that 'working people' would never agree to make war on the Soviet Union: the thirteenth issue (simply dated December 1939) reported a French lieutenant-colonel as saying: 'I know my men, they will go over to the Red Army', and commented that the officer was quite right!

The 'phoney war' came to an end on 10 May 1940, when German troops entered Belgium, Holland and Luxemburg. Then began one of the swiftest campaigns in military history. On the 14th the French front was opened at Sedan, on the 15th Holland surrendered, on the 27th it was Belgium's turn, on the 14th June the Nazis entered Paris (declared an open city the day before), and on the 17th it was all over as far as France was concerned: Hitler had won, and Pétain (Reynaud's successor as Prime Minister) was suing for an armistice. Our chief source of information concerning the PCF during that short but crucial period is again *L'Humanité*, of which eleven issues were produced. Unfortunately, there is a gap between 24 May and 17 June, as issues nos. 50–54 (inclusive) are missing.[20] In the 17 May issue, the first one to come out after Hitler's attack, the leading article indicted 'the capitalists' for their pre-war policy of 'appeasement', and claimed that the Fifth Column was still 'intact in our country'. It then went on to say: 'The restoration of peace, the security and independence of our country, freedom and social progress, all require that the government of the 200 families should be ruthlessly kicked out. . . ' And it concluded with an appeal for 'peace, bread, liberty and independence'. That the word 'independence' was used twice reflected the party's awareness of the threat against France, but the call for peace, equally made twice, did not sound either convincing or practical. On 20 May the paper warned that the bourgeoisie and its

government agents were 'ready to sacrifice the country's independence provided Hitler continues to guarantee their capitalist privileges'. On 24 May it demanded the formation of 'a people's government, relying on the popular masses, taking measures against reaction, and reaching an agreement with the Soviet Union for the return of peace'. On 17 June it printed the slogan, 'Workers of all lands, unite', in both French and German, but apart from reporting the grave military situation and repeating the call for 'a people's government', it made no direct comment. However, on 19 June, as the details of the French surrender became known, its leading article, entitled, 'The Communists accuse', declared in italics: '*Those who are responsible for the defeat have signed the act of capitulation . . . Frenchmen, you will have to call these incompetent generals to account . . . The French people has the right to call those who are responsible for such a disaster to account.*' On 24 June, under the headline, *Building Peace*, *L'Humanité* wrote that the task of negotiating 'a just peace' could only be undertaken by a 'people's government', not by those who had surrendered to Hitler and those who were still 'the lackeys of the City of London', and it concluded in bold capitals, 'Make way for the people'.

In addition to *L'Humanité*, two documents throw further light on the PCF's attitude during the last stages of the war in France. One is a party statement which, according to Thorez, was printed and distributed just before the fall of Paris. (It appeared in English in the July 1940 issue of *The Communist International*, but a full retranslation into French appeared only in the summer 1983 issue of the *Cahiers d'Histoire de l'IRM*.) It began by saying that the French people were 'experiencing tragic days', that 'a foreign army [had] burst into France', and that 'the French imperialists' were 'preparing to capitulate behind the backs of the people'. It went on to indict both politicians and generals, the former for having actually helped Germany before the war and refused a Franco–Soviet alliance, and the latter for having ignored the achievements of modern military technique, especially 'the two essential weapons of modern warfare . . . : tanks and planes'. It complained that 'the French ruling class [had] had eight months in which . . . to organise a real defence of the country', yet had 'waged war, not against the German Army, but against the working class of their own country'. In order to save France from an impending catastrophe, it demanded the adoption of 'exceptional measures . . . of a political, social, economic, *military* [emphasised in

the original] and organisational character'. Finally, the statement pledged that Communists would 'remain with [their] people', whose spirit, it proclaimed, could not be broken by 'traitors, exploiters, plunderers and conquerors', and it asserted that 'the working class, the people of France [would] never accept foreign domination'.

The other document is the list of proposals sent by the PCF leadership to the government on 6 June 1940. These are mentioned by Thorez in his autobiography[21] and by Duclos in his Memoirs,[22] but the full story behind them is told by Aragon in *Les Communistes*.[23] He writes that at the end of May, the minister, Anatole de Monzie, approached the PCF scientist, Jacques Solomon, and asked him to find out through his friend, Politzer, then stationed in Paris, on what conditions the clandestine Communist leadership would take part 'in a war of a changed character'. The party responded on 6 June and declared that it was necessary, first, 'to transform the character of the war by turning it into a national war for freedom and independence'; secondly, to release all Communist deputies and other militants in jail; thirdly, to arrest and punish all enemy agents; fourthly, to decree without delay a mass mobilisation (*levée en masse*); and finally, 'to arm the people and turn Paris into an impregnable citadel'.[24] These proposals never reached the Prime Minister because Monzie lost his post after a cabinet reshuffle.

The fact that the only sources available are Communist sources has led some critics to express doubt about the whole matter. For example, Fauvet, without actually denying the existence of the proposals, is somewhat sceptical and argues that the first condition in particular 'is contradicted by the whole of Communist underground literature of that period'.[25] It is not a very convincing argument. First, the situation was unprecedented ('a foreign army [had] burst into France'), so that previous PCF publications are not a sufficient guide. Secondly, Fauvet does not seem to be aware of the June statement mentioned above, which stressed the need for 'exceptional measures', including *military* measures. But even if the party statement was not available to him, he ought to have noticed that *L'Humanité*'s tone had altered considerably after the 10th May. Admittedly, the paper continued to call for peace, but the semi-ritual repetition of this call was oddly out of place with the demand for a people's government, whose task, incidentally, was to 'impose' peace.[26] Thirdly, after Hitler's occupation of Holland, Denmark and Norway, the Comintern called on Communists 'to head the struggle for the restoration of national

independence'.[27] The underground PCF leadership may not have been in daily contact with the International, but there is nothing improbable in the convergence of their views on the need to stop Hitler. Fourthly, French Communists must have been aware of the USSR's diplomatic moves to improve relations with France and Britain, for example, its willingness to supply France with planes at her request and the welcome afforded to Sir Stafford Cripps, the new British ambassador in Moscow. Finally, Tillon reports that a Communist delegation tried to reach Herriot on 15 June to ask him if he would head the opposition to surrender, and narrowly escaped arrest. In the light of these facts, it seems at least plausible that in June 1940 the PCF briefly contemplated the possibility of changing the character of the war. On the other hand, there is no evidence that the 6 June proposals amounted to more than 'flying a kite'. Even if we generously concede that one of the missing issues of *L'Humanité* might have contained the proposals, it is a fact that those which came out after the defeat never referred to them. None of them said: If only we had been heard, this war would have become 'a people's war' and France would have won. What they did say was: If only Communists had been heard, the country would have been spared the horrors of war and the humiliation of defeat. How this might have happened was not spelt out, and the magic recipe, as always, was alliance with the Soviet Union. It may well be that, privately, PCF leaders thought that a last-minute agreement with the USSR would have enabled France to wage war under better conditions, but officially, they could not and did not say so, first because it would have embarrassed the Soviet government, and secondly, because they would not have been believed, since no one in those days ever imagined that a French Communist *diplomatic* initiative was possible without Soviet blessing. And *officially* (what was happening behind the scenes is another matter), the USSR was keen to remain neutral and had not expressed any wish to support France in a defensive war against Hitler.

Looking back upon the events related so far, we can see that the PCF's assessment of the war until June 1940 went through three stages, which may be seen at a glance in the diagram overleaf.

The switch from the first attitude (which, incidentally, was also that of the British CP until Pollitt was replaced by Palme Dutt in October 1939) is generally attributed to Soviet and Comintern pressure, but when and how this pressure was exerted, it is difficult to say. In fact, it is not at all improbable that French Communists changed

Period	*PCF's assessment*	*Slogans summing up PCF's stand*
September 1939	A war against Hitler, led by a reactionary government	(1) National unity (2) Fight Hitler in earnest (3) Restore democratic freedoms
October 1939–May 1940	An imperialist war on both sides; an anti-working-class war; a potential anti-Soviet war	(1) Restore peace (2) Release imprisoned Communists (3) Alliance with the USSR (4) Form a new government
May–June 1940	Still an imperialist war, but France's independence is threatened	(1) The 200 families are leading France to disaster (2) A people's government (3) Turn the war into an anti-fascist war* (4) Defend Paris by arming the people*

* These two slogans are found in the PCF's 6/6 proposals exclusively.

their tune of their own accord, without being ordered to do so, simply because at the end of September the USSR had openly called on all the belligerent states to make peace. It will be recalled that one of the earliest mentions of peace in the PCF's propaganda occurred in the letter sent to Herriot, which specifically referred to the 28 September Soviet–German declaration. Writing in 1979, Jean Suret-Canale, an old campaigner, remarked that 'The errors of interpretation committed by the International are undeniable, but let us not heap abuse on it! We were quite capable of committing them by ourselves and many of us did so, without in the least being acquainted with its texts.'[28] Although the official Comintern line was expressed by Dimitrov, in an article reproduced by *L'Humanité* in November 1939, one cannot say whether it had been communicated to the PCF leadership, then driven underground, before that date. Dimitrov's article said that 'the present war [was] *an unjust imperialist* war on both sides', but it was much more critical of Britain and France than of Germany, and it ended with a call to the world working class 'to struggle to put an end

to this predatory war'. The PCF had already come to this view and probably had done so before being acquainted with Dimitrov's article. Among the various factors which led to its assessment, there was, first, the fact that the 'phoney' character of the war became obvious after Britain and France had passively watched Poland's collapse without taking military action to prevent it; secondly, the anti-Communist repression in France, which seemed to confirm that 'the French imperialists' were making war on their own working class rather than Hitler; and, finally, the Soviet diplomatic initiative already mentioned.

It is in this last respect that the PCF's attitude was most strongly open to criticism, even from a strictly Communist point of view, because it was based on the assumption that a move by the Soviet government was in effect a directive to the whole Communist movement. Now, it would have been perfectly possible to defend the USSR's neutrality without going to the lengths of preaching the same neutrality to French Communists and democrats. In any case, such a neutrality was plainly impossible: the PCF was not a foreign power, it was part of France, and as such, it simply had to say on which side of the fence it stood. But it did not. Naturally, it did not say that it was on Hitler's side, but neither did it say explicitly that it was on the side of *the French people* who wanted to fight against Hitler. It was torn between its loyalty to the Comintern and Stalin and its loyalty to France. As both were very strong, it was unable to come up with a concrete policy. At no time, except in its 6 June proposals – and then by implication only – did it ever say that if a 'just peace' could not be obtained, France should continue the war to save her independence. What is even more serious, by telling both sides in the war, 'A plague on both your houses', it failed to appreciate where the main danger lay. To declare, as Billoux had done at his trial, that Communists did not want to become either Chamberlain's vassals or Hitler's slaves was, at best, an empty gesture: the risk of becoming Chamberlain's 'vassals' may have been real, but the threat of enslavement by Hitler was undoubtedly more real and much worse. It was not enough to denounce the ruling class for leading the country to defeat without suggesting a practical alternative apart from peace.

The anti-fascist mood of large sections of the French people, which the PCF itself had helped to create, was such that to them, a demand for peace seemed little short of surrender. The weakness of the party's position had its root in the fear of antagonising the Comintern. Had

that fear been absent, French Communists might have realised that the CI had 'left out the national-liberation tendencies that were present in this war',[29] as the authors of the orthodox *Outline History* belatedly conceded. Moreover, when the war started in earnest in May 1940, the continued call for peace was so unrealistic that it came dangerously close to political irresponsibility. Could it be seriously assumed that Hitler, whose armies were triumphantly breaking down all resistance at lightning speed, would have listened to peace overtures, even if they had been supported by the Soviet Union? Did it require great political acumen to realise that the war was no longer 'phoney' but one of sheer survival for France? Implicitly, all the urgent measures demanded by *L'Humanité* in May and June amounted to a demand to change the character of the war. Why not have said so explicitly? The inescapable answer is that this could not be done so long as the PCF stuck to the rigid Comintern line that the war was 'imperialist' – without any qualifications.

On the practical side, the PCF's attitude proved to be a tragic mistake. It offended national feelings and it provided the party's enemies with an undreamt-of propaganda weapon. In Parliament, Communists were accused of being the agents of a foreign power and of having stabbed France in the back. It is difficult to deny that the party's own stance gave some appearance of credibility to these charges. That the PCF was still anti-fascist and was still concerned about France's fate is certain. That largely through its own fault it failed to prove this to people outside its ranks is equally certain. It is not up to historians to pronounce a final verdict. They can only examine whether any given policy met the requirements of a given situation. One cannot say that the PCF's policy did that, for it was one-sided. Communists were well placed to appreciate the anti-working-class trend in the war since they had themselves been the chief casualty. But they were also well placed to know that the people needed more positive slogans than peace and the denunciation of 'warmongers' in order to be mobilised against probably incompetent rulers at home and the Nazis abroad.

Before leaving this issue, one must note that the PCF's stand during the war (and also during the years of German occupation) cannot be assessed only in terms of the leadership's views and pronouncements. What ordinary members felt and did is equally important, though, of course, much harder to ascertain. However, the few documents available, such as diaries, reminiscences (which

appeared later, either in book form or in newspaper articles), and even novels (e.g. Aragon's *Les Communistes*, already mentioned) can give us some idea of the position. Naturally, all these sources should be approached with great caution, not only because some of them may have been doctored after the event, but also because, as we know, time can play funny tricks with people's memories. Be that as it may, the evidence at our disposal tends to suggest two things. One is that the leadership's line was generally endorsed, especially during the 'phoney war', since the denunciation of the government's repressive measures could be matched by the actual experience of individual Communists. Secondly, the majority of Communist militants felt great indignation against the civil and military authorities in view of their unwillingness to fight Hitler in earnest. Their indignation did not have to be couched in 'diplomatic' language, i.e. it did not have to be accompanied by the reminder that the war was 'imperialist on both sides', particularly in May–June 1940. For, as soon as the *blitzkrieg* started, the chief preoccupation of the Communists who were in the armed forces was to try, together with other patriotic soldiers, to resist the Germans, irrespective of the fact that they were given no lead by most of their commanding officers. One cannot say that the militants' behaviour *contradicted* the party line, but it was certainly not marred by the official call for peace, which the leadership maintained to the very end.

First year of Occupation (June 1940–June 1941)

The June 1940 defeat created a new situation, characterised by the country's occupation (the nominally 'free zone' ceased to exist after 1942), the setting up of Pétain's Vichy regime[30] (which was ratified by Parliament, with the exception of some eighty votes), the beginnings of the so-called *Révolution Nationale* (a mixture of authoritarianism and allegedly Christian values), and the French people's physical and psychological exhaustion. The last point was initially very important: about ten million soldiers and civilians had fled as the Germans advanced through France, and in the first few months after the defeat their chief preoccupations were food, which was strictly rationed, employment and shelter, which were both hard to get, and finding their friends and relatives. Roger Bourderon sums up the situation by asking, 'What to think, how to think in such circumstances?'[31] The PCF was deeply affected by the general collapse, although it was the only pre-war political party which managed to keep some sort of

existence. On 20 December 1940, the *Daily Telegraph* correspondent noted that 'Political sentiment is in a state of flux, the only party still existing, though illegally, being that of the Communists, and over 1,000 of them were arrested last month. They are distributing anti-German tracts with a strong appeal to French patriotic sentiment.' Initially, the nucleus around which the party reorganised itself in Paris amounted to a mere 180 to 200 people.[32] The impossibility of having lengthy political discussions, let alone of holding congresses, encouraged both discipline and initiative. In 1980 Henri Jourdain wrote: 'In one way, I was never more disciplined in relation to the leadership's directives, . . . yet, in another, I never had to make so many personal decisions.'[33] As a clandestine organisation, the PCF had to be reorganised in such a way that maximum security was achieved. The basic party unit was a group of three people, in which the leader alone knew who the other two were, and kept in touch with the next party link, the cell, which was made up of three groups. *Sections* and *fédérations* were constituted on the same basis, and all higher bodies were led by a 'leadership triangle' – one person in charge of propaganda, another in charge of political work, and a third in charge of mass work. All activities were directed by the CC, most of whose members were in Paris. Party members were encouraged to work in legal bodies, such as trade unions, and in the early days, only a minority – those who belonged to military bodies – led an underground existence.

The political difficulties were as serious as the organisational ones. In particular, two factors accounted for the PCF's early confusion and mistakes. One was its own recent condemnation of the 'imperialist war', and the other was that Vichy and the occupiers had not yet shown their hand. However, the Vichy regime was immediately described as 'rotten' (in *L'Humanité* of 7 July) and as made up of 'traitors and robbers' (in *L'Humanité* of 13th). That the Germans were not attacked until later has led hostile critics to assert that the PCF did not begin to fight them before June 1941, when the USSR entered the war. We shall see presently that this assertion is not borne out by the evidence, but the party's initial blunders may have helped to accredit it. The first of these blunders was the slogan of 'Fraternisation' which was carried by the first issues of *L'Humanité* immediately after the armistice. Although there was no mention of 'Franco-German brotherhood' at government level, the slogan was singularly misplaced, and it was soon dropped, possibly after the paper and the

leadership had received spirited protests from party members.[34]

A second, more serious, error was the assumption which the leadership seems to have entertained for a short while that the Nazis might allow the party to function 'semi-legally'. A. Rossi makes much of a secret instruction which he claims was sent to 'trusted members' at the end of June, and which forecast (quite mistakenly as it turned out) that the Nazis would make demagogic attempts to 'use' the party, adding that, in such circumstances, Communists should be ready 'to ally [themselves] – temporarily – with the devil himself'.[35] This last phrase is interpreted by Rossi as proof that the PCF had turned 'collaborationist', but apart from the fact that the document may not be genuine,[36] one must point out, first, that nowhere else in PCF documents are the Germans ever described as 'temporary allies', and secondly, that the word 'collaborationist' applies to those who gave full support to the Nazis, practically and ideologically, which the PCF never did. Fauvet points out that ' . . . contrary to what has often been asserted, this rather short-sighted opportunism never leads to any kind of "collaboration" with the Germans: the latter are not combated, but merely ignored. Or rather, there is a pretence of ignoring them . . . '[37].

A third mistake was the request made to the German authorities towards the end of June to allow legal publication of *L'Humanité*. The negotiations (which lasted a few days only) were conducted by Maurice Tréand and Jean Catelas, both CC members, by Denise Ginollin, then active in the Communist Youth Movement (JC), and by a party lawyer, Foissin. The most important move was a visit paid by Tréand and Catelas to Otto Abetz on 26 June, which was followed by a letter they sent him, asking him to allow the legal publication of *L'Humanité* 'in the same form under which it appeared to its readers before it was banned by Daladier . . . '. The letter recalled that Communists had been against the war and had been persecuted for their stand. Finally, it pledged that *L'Humanité* would denounce 'British imperialism' (adding, however, that it would also call on all colonies to fight for their independence) and that it would campaign for 'a lasting peace', to be achieved by a Franco–Soviet pact 'which would be the complement of the Soviet–German pact'. The negotiations proved abortive because the Germans quickly realised that they would not be able to control *L'Humanité*. Abetz decided instead to launch another daily, *La France au Travail* (with which Foissin eventually collaborated), to which he cleverly gave the same format as

L'Humanité, and which he presented as an organ of the 'revolutionary left'.

It is a pity that for many years after the war, the PCF tended to keep quiet about the whole affair, but such evasiveness disappeared in the 1970s and the incident is no longer denied by party leaders and party historians.[38] There is no reason why it should be, since the preceding account tends to show that the mistake should neither be magnified out of all proportion nor under-estimated. There was never any question of *L'Humanité* becoming a pro-German paper, and Fauvet reports that Denise Ginollin, acting on Tréand's instructions, informed the Germans that, whilst the Communist organ would not call for 'riots', it would 'not serve German interests in any way'.[39] The move must be seen as a tactical one, well in keeping with Communist practice (dating back to Lenin and the Comintern) of making use of all 'legal possibilities'. On the other hand, it was a serious mistake, first, to assume that the Germans would respond favourably (on the ground that their pact with the Soviet Union had somehow lessened their anti-communism), and secondly, to overlook the fact that the appearance of *L'Humanité* with German blessing would create a lot of confusion. Whether the whole PCF leadership (or even the CI) was involved, we do not know. Two PCF journalists, Crémieux and Estager, assert that Tréand acted on his own initiative, but another Communist, Pierre Villon, suggested in his posthumous memoirs that Tréand had received instructions from higher (unnamed) bodies.[40] What is certain is that Duclos and Frachon *later* condemned the move and that Foissin was subsequently expelled. No further approach was made to the occupying authorities, although *L'Humanité* continued to demand the right of legal publication, but this time as a fighting slogan.

Apart from *L'Humanité*, the most important PCF documents in 1940 are the 10 July Appeal, the November *Letter to Communist militants* and the CC *Manifesto* of the same month. Much ink has been spilt over the first one, both by Communists, who initially asserted that it was 'the first act of Resistance on French soil', and by non-Communists, who maintained that it was nothing of the sort. The controversy is practically over now, as modern PCF historians acknowledge the Appeal's limitations. According to Duclos, it was dated 10 July to coincide with the last meeting of Parliament, but as new copies of it were being printed over a period of three months, a few additions were made from time to time in the light of current

developments.[41] The signatories were Maurice Thorez and Jacques Duclos, and it is not at all unlikely that the former was consulted before the final draft was ready. Half a million copies were distributed by means of illegal leaflets. The Appeal is made up of a Preamble and of seven sections. The Preamble mentions the 'humiliation' of foreign occupation and adds in capitals that 'France should belong to the French' and that workers express 'the will for independence of a whole people'. The first section is a vindication of the party's recent policy, contrasted with that of the ruling class which waged war on the people and deliberately betrayed the country. The second section declares that France wants to be free, that it rejects 'the Vichy adventurers', and that 'never will a great people such as ours be a people of slaves'. The third section asks, 'Who, then, can put France back on her feet?', and answers that 'it is with the people that the great hope of national and social liberation rests'. It adds that it is around the working class, 'guided by the Communist Party', that 'a front can be built for freedom, independence and the rebirth of France'. The fourth section demands measures such as the nationalisation of key sectors and a check on war profiteers. The fifth section is made up of political demands, chiefly the punishment of 'those who caused France's present tragedy' and the restoration of democratic freedoms. The sixth section calls for a 'genuine peace', which is said to be inseparable from France's independence. The seventh section calls for the formation of a 'people's government', and of 'popular committees', both in the workplaces and in the localities.

In the light of the above summary, one may conclude that the Appeal did not actually mention 'resistance' to the Germans (as it came to be understood later), but, that although its chief target was Vichy, it had anti-German connotations. Otherwise, the eloquent stress on independence would have been meaningless. What was missing was an indication of how such independence might be won back, and if the Appeal was silent on this issue, it was, partly (but only partly), because its authors still clung to the view that the war was 'imperialist on both sides', and partly, because, at that early stage, military resistance on a serious scale could hardly be envisaged on French soil. (De Gaulle's famous appeal of 18 June did not mention it either for those who were still in France, since it called on patriots to join him in England or carry on the fight in the colonies.) This last point does not provide an excuse for the PCF leadership's one-sidedness, but it helps to remind us that the real state of affairs

immediately after France's crushing defeat should *also* be borne in mind. Moreover, it is worth noting that many ordinary party members read the Appeal as an encouragement to carry on with their long-standing anti-fascist struggle. In this respect, there was some discrepancy between them and their leaders, but to speak of a clash, as some critics suggest, is probably excessive. It is safer to assume that, initially at any rate, the leadership was more cautious in its public pronouncements. The caution gradually disappeared as the party got more involved in the fight against the occupiers.

The *Letter to Communist militants* was also signed by Thorez and Duclos, because these two names symbolised unbroken Communist leadership. It describes the Pétain-Laval government as one which is protected by 'German bayonets', and the 'National Revolution' as a misnomer because it is really 'reaction imported from abroad'. After declaring that France should not fight for either Britain or Germany, it concludes with the remark that the PCF is attacked by both Vichy and the Nazis, which proves 'the blackguardism' (*la canaillerie*) of those who had accused it of being pro-German. Rossi's assertion that the authors of the *Letter* 'are very happy that France should have been defeated' is based on an incomplete quotation. The letter does say that 'a powerful imperialism has been overthrown' and that 'those who were in the habit of waging war by proxy are compelled to fight directly' (as reported by Rossi), but after this obvious reference to France and Britain, there is a no less obvious reference to the Nazis: 'Those who were relying on lightning decisive victories must start all over again at the very time when they thought that it was all settled.' The CC *Manifesto*, after saying that France had become 'a kind of German protectorate', outlines the Communist alternative – 'a people's government' which would liberate the national territory, establish friendly relations 'with the German people', sign a pact with the USSR, nationalise big firms, and build a new democracy.

From party documents let us pass on to party activity. First, there was the formation of popular committees, as these provided the best opportunity for the party to be close to the people and regain its influence. They were meant to take up any issue, however trivial, around which opposition to the regime could be built, but the most important were those set up in the factories with the aim of ensuring food supplies and of fighting against unemployment. Secondly, there was the stocking of arms and the laying of the material basis for future armed resistance. Although the forms this resistance would eventu-

ally take were not, and could not be clear at the time, the CC sent secret instructions to militants to recover arms (chiefly those left by the retreating French army) and to hide them. The punishment in case of discovery was death, and at least one Communist had to pay that supreme penalty. If evidence of this aspect of party activity is not found in the PCF's own publications, for obvious reasons, there is no dearth of information in the legal press and in the reports submitted by local government officials. For example, the *préfet* of the Aube *département* wrote that 'the Communist Party has organised the collection of arms abandoned by the French army over all the territory'.[42] It soon became clear that PCF propagandists and activists needed military protection to carry on their work, and it was in order to provide them with such protection that armed groups were set up, first in the Paris area, and later in the north. By the autumn of 1940, all these groups were brought together into an *Organisation Spéciale* (OS), which eventually became a proper army of the interior and took the name of *Francs-Tireurs et Partisans*[43] (FTP). Reports sent by Gestapo officials confirm the existence of these 'shock-groups of six to eight men whose task is to provide a regular service of observation and protection'.[44]

As the Germans gradually gave up their pretence of neutrality and 'korrektness' by arresting all protesters and by shooting a few of them, the PCF began to issue calls for sabotage. Such was the mood among the working population that in some factories these acts of sabotage took on a massive character. Moreover, trains carrying food to Germany were often derailed. One of the first actions undertaken by the OS was the cutting of telephone cábles used by the occupiers. In March 1941 the *Journal d'Amiens* remarked that 'order' was maintained by the German army, and it anxiously asked, 'But what about afterwards?'

The PCF was also active on the political and ideological fronts. In October 1940 it issued a *Letter to a Socialist worker*, of which 100,000 copies were distributed, asserting that Communists wanted unity with the Socialist rank-and-file, even with those who had swallowed 'the warmongers' insults' against the PCF. As for the Socialist leadership, the question of reaching agreement with it hardly arose, since the SFIO had practically collapsed: on 10 July, most of its deputies, led by Paul Faure, had voted for Pétain, with only thirty-six refusing to do so and six abstaining. It was only much later that the Socialist party reconstituted itself, thanks to Blum and Daniel Mayer,

by the creation of two Socialist Action Committees, one in the north and one in the south. (The two merged in 1943 and elected Mayer as the executive's secretary.) In December 1940 the PCF published a *Letter to a Radical working man* (the word used was *travailleur*, which is broader than *ouvrier*), which appealed to the peasants' and middle classes' patriotism. Finally, despite the support given to Pétain by the Catholic hierarchy, the Communists noted with satisfaction that a lot of Catholics hated the Nazis, and the policy of *la main tendue* was revived.

Turning now to the battle of ideas, two anti-Nazi brochures deserve to be mentioned. One was Politzer's *Réponse à Sang et Or* (February 1941), which answered Rosenberg's claim that the Nazis were waging the battle of 'blood versus gold' by saying that they were in fact enslaving other nations. The other was Péri's *Non, le nazisme n'est pas le socialisme* (April 1941), which asserted that it was 'a betrayal of socialism' to allow France to become 'a protectorate of Nazi Germany'.

In May 1941, the PCF launched the 'National Front of struggle for France's independence'. The CC issued a statement which still referred to the need for peace, but added that the struggle for peace went hand in hand with the struggle against national oppression. Then the statement outlined a programme around which national unity could be built. This included the withdrawal of occupation troops, nationalisation of monopolies, and democracy. It stressed that in the *Front National*, there was room for 'all French people of good will', with the exception of 'surrender-mongers [*les capitulards*] and traitors', and it pledged PCF support to 'any French government, any organisation and any individual' that was fighting against national oppression. In spite of this, however, de Gaulle came in for some criticism. Although he was no longer described as an 'agent of British imperialism', his movement was said to be 'in the image of British imperialism', and its inspiration was attacked as 'reactionary and colonialist'. Co-operation with Gaullism was not ruled out in so many words, but it was stressed that national liberation could not be achieved under its leadership. Commenting on the CC's initiative, *L'Humanité* wrote that its aim was to prevent France from becoming 'a Nazi colony'. The *Front National* was destined to play a crucial role in the Resistance.

Finally, mention must be made of the May–June 1941 miners' strike, the most spectacular anti-Nazi mass action before June 1941.

The immediate cause was economic (starvation wages), but it soon took on a political character. The movement was 'initially spontaneous and rash',[45] but when Communist militants stepped in, they were able to provide organisation and leadership. The best known were Michel Brulé and Auguste Lecoeur.[46] Military protection for the strikers was provided by OS units, led by two Communists, Debarge and Capel. As many as 100,000 miners struck, and by doing so, they deprived the Germans of half a million tons of coal. On 20 June *L'Humanité* hailed the strike as proof that 'the occupation cannot stop the working class from acting in support of its demands'. The PCF CC congratulated the miners, and Debarge wrote in his *Notebooks* that 'the Germans should understand that the working class has not signed an act of surrender with the occupiers'.

The PCF's record during the June 1940–June 1941 period has been variously assessed. The most hostile account comes from an ex-Comintern official, Amilcare Rossi, who charges French Communists with 'defeatism' and blind following of Moscow. It is a pity that his books, which contain a wealth of information, should rely on selective documentation and should be marred by political hatred, bordering at times on hysteria.[47] More balanced assessments may be found in the studies of Fauvet, Touchard and Noguères. Fauvet draws attention to the party's return to anti-fascism, '*l'anti-fascisme retrouvé*',[48] as from October 1940. The late Jean Touchard, a scholar with a deservedly high reputation, rejects the charge of 'collaboration' and credits PCF members with 'many acts of individual resistance and even of collective resistance at a local level before June 1941'.[49] (Incidentally, in the first year of occupation, *all* acts of resistance were either individual – because of poor communication – or local. Nationwide resistance, whether Communist or not, did not start until the Nazis withdrew many of their troops to fight on the eastern front.) Finally, Henri Noguères, the most reliable historian of the Resistance, asserts that there is enough evidence to show that Communists started to fight the Germans well before June 1941, and that to deny this is either 'to err out of ignorance' or to display 'asinine stupidity' ('*ânonner*').[50] He concedes that, in view of its characterisation of the war as 'imperialist', the PCF was in an 'uncomfortable position', but he adds that 'this discomfort [was] due precisely to the existence of a genuine Communist Resistance'.[51] A Resistance, he insists, that was co-ordinated by the party centre because otherwise the actions of individual Communists would have had neither meaning nor effec-

tiveness. That the whole issue remains controversial is shown by the fact that one of Noguères' two collaborators, J. L. Vigier, disagrees with him and maintains that individual Communist resisters were at odds with the leadership.[52] As for the PCF's own assessment of its record, it tended for a long time to be defensive and apologetic, but in 1979–80 Communist historians and and ordinary militants displayed a refreshing willingness to examine the period more critically and to mention the party's mistakes as well as its achievements.[53]

'Le parti des fusillés'

On 22 June 1941 Hitler attacked the Soviet Union. In France the Resistance grew to become a force which had to be reckoned with. For Communists, there was of course the fact that 'the socialist motherland was in danger', but also, for them as well as for others, that the opportunities were so much greater since Germany had to fight on two fronts. Although Hitler still achieved a number of *blitzkrieg* victories, his armies did not enter Moscow, and for the first time, did not seem invincible. Well might the French Rodrigue say to the powerful German *Comte*, '*Ton bras est invaincu, mais non pas invincible*'. As soon as news of the aggression became known, on 22 June itself, *L'Humanité* pointed out that many German soldiers had been removed from France, and added: 'Why should we not take advantage of this?' From then on, the PCF threw all its forces into the battle, and soon it earned for itself the nickname of *parti des fusillés*,[54] because so many of its members were shot by the Nazis. It is impossible to substantiate the one-time claim that 75,000 Communists perished, but the number of PCF victims was very high, probably higher than that of any other single group or party.

The first shot (literally) was fired in Paris by Fabien, a Communist, who killed a German officer in broad daylight on 23 August 1941. A week later a German NCO was shot down. In September four armed partisans set fire to a factory that was working for the Nazis after making sure that all its workers had been evacuated to safety. In the weeks and months which followed, armed attacks and acts of sabotage became regular occurrences, especially in Paris, in the north and all along the coast. By the end of 1941, the guerilla fighters were in a position to issue regular communiques reporting the number of Germans killed or wounded and the amount of war material destroyed, damaged or captured. In February 1942 the somewhat loose organisation of the OS had become obsolete, and the PCF decided to bring



all the guerilla groups together and form them into companies which were organised on stricter military lines. Thus the OS became the *Francs-Tireurs et Partisans* (FTP). In the summer of 1942 the party called on all patriots to join the new 'army' and pledged that its own members would swell its ranks. Throughout the war, the FTP were led and largely manned by Communists, but the movement was not confined to them. The basic FTP unit was constituted by two four-men teams, each led by a leader who alone had links with other teams and with regional and national HQs. As in the case of the party itself, the aim was to combine maximum efficiency with maximum security. In addition to armed attacks, the FTP, like the OS from which they had sprung, provided military protection, especially to workers who resisted forcible transfer to Germany. This transfer had started in September 1942, though it was only in February 1943 that it formally became the *Service du Travail Obligatoire* (STO). The FTP got little help from the western allies and from de Gaulle, both of whom were suspicious of 'Reds', and on the whole, they had to rely on the arms they had captured or made themselves.[55] The FTP leader was Charles Tillon, a Communist who had fought in Spain.

The Nazis' reply to FTP activities was to shoot hostages, sometimes as many as fifty for a single German soldier killed. Hostages were also shot as an answer to sabotage, even if no loss of life had been incurred. The countless Communists who were executed generally sang both the *Marseillaise* and the *Internationale* before they died, and they managed to shout 'Long live France, long live the PCF!' A great many added, 'Long live the USSR, long live Stalin!' One of them, Jean-Pierre Timbaud, shouted, 'Long live the *German* Communist Party!' A few managed to leave farewell messages (Sémard, Decour, Péri) which expressed their certainty that the Nazis would be beaten.

In May 1943 Duclos summed up the PCF's policy in the slogan, *S'unir – s'armer – se battre*, and he spelt out its political significance by writing in *L'Humanité* that France had to liberate herself in order to earn the right to control her own destinies after the war. On this issue, the PCF clashed with de Gaulle, as will be seen. In September 1943 a PCF-inspired move was the creation of *milices patriotiques*. These, unlike the FTP (a permanent military organisation), were made up of armed civilians whose task was to harass the enemy and complement the FTP's work. In May 1944 a Central Council of Patriotic Militias co-ordinated their activities.

It must not be thought that the PCF found it easy to win over the majority of the people to the concept of armed struggle. In fact, it had to wage a tough battle on this issue. The chief argument used against it was that it brought harsh reprisals from the Nazis, and Vichy laboured that point in its propaganda. For a while, even de Gaulle advised patience and restraint until the western allies came to the rescue. That was nicknamed *attentisme* (wait-and-see tactics). The PCF's answer was given in *L'Humanité* of 14 March 1942: 'If we don't act against the Boches, they will make us all die little by little, some through starvation, some in gaols, and some as hostages. Yes, it is better to fight in order to destroy the enemy rather than allow oneself to be killed by him.' To the accusation of 'terrorism', the party replied that the real terrorists were the Nazis, who shot innocent hostages. When Georges Politzer, arrested in 1942, was asked by the German officer interrogating him if he knew the names of 'terrorists', he replied, 'Yes, I do. The two greatest terrorists operating in France are Stülpnagel and Pétain'. However, even among Communists, there were misgivings about armed struggle: had not the party always condemned individual terrorism? The leadership replied, first, that 'the whole Party must get ready for armed struggle', secondly, that the actions of individuals and small groups were but the prelude to mass action, and finally, that if many deeds had to be carried out individually, they were all part of a collective strategy.

Despite its emphasis on military struggles, the PCF did not neglect socio-economic, political and ideological struggles. Non-Communists used to regard the former as trivial, but the party insisted that they were important. In September 1942 *L'Humanité* urged French women to demand a minimum bread ration of 500 grammes per day, and added: 'A group of 200 mothers demonstrating outside the town hall, a workshop going on strike in order to get bread, . . . these are our battle plans, which the starvation-mongers of Vichy dread. *There lies our strength.*' One should also note that a Communist victory in the trade union movement was that in April 1943, the CGT readmitted the militants it had expelled in 1939. Politically, the PCF's most important contributions were its role in creating the *Front National* and in helping to create the National Resistance Council. Of the former, Fauvet writes that 'This broad clandestine alliance, popular and patriotic, is . . . one of the "great" resistance movements in the occupied zone; it will soon make its presence felt in the southern zone. Two men, two Communists, are its leaders. In Paris, Pierre Villon; in

Lyons, Georges Marrane.'[56] Even the FTP, under the leadership of another Communist, Charles Tillon, came under the *Front National*'s wing, although in practice, they were autonomous. As for the *Conseil National de la Résistance* (CNR), it came into being in May 1943. The unification of all resistance groups had been repeatedly urged by the PCF, but initially, de Gaulle was lukewarm. Eventually, he realised that the formation of a single Resistance body would kill two birds with one stone. It would enable him to check the Communists and to enjoy greater authority in dealing with Britain and the USA. The latter clearly wished their own men to take over in occupied Europe, and to this effect they had set up an Allied Military Government of Occupied Territories (AMGOT). De Gaulle rightly thought that an AMGOT administration would prove unnecessary in his country if there was a body in France which was, to all intents and purposes, a provisional government. However, long negotiations were needed before the CNR was finally formed. The Gaullist delegate, Jean Moulin, began by demanding that the *Front National* and the FTP be disbanded, but later, in spite of de Gaulle's wish, he had to give in on that point, and he agreed that all military groups, including the FTP, would be represented without losing their separate identity. Eventually, the CNR was made up of all these groups, of all anti-German political parties (PCF, SFIO, Radicals and three smaller ones), of the main trade unions (CGT and CFTC, the Christian confederation), and of a representative from de Gaulle's French National Committee. In March 1944 the CNR adopted a programme of post-war social and political reforms which involved in particular the nationalisation of monopolies, the right to work, a decent minimum wage for all, a Health and Social Security service, democratic rights for the colonies, and a reform of education. The CNR programme became the official programme of France's first post-war governments.

Two other events further helped the PCF to build the national unity which it never ceased to advocate on the ground that it was indispensable for victory. One was the dissolution of the Comintern, proposed by the ECCI presidium in May 1943 and implemented in June. Although the decision to dissolve the Communist centre was justified both by the 'greater maturity' of CPs and by the great differences among them, the timing of the move was also stressed. Thorez, who seconded Manuilsky's resolution, said that dissolving the Comintern would 'help to widen the national anti-Hitler front in

France'. The other event was the unification of all military resistance groups in February 1944, which took the name of *Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur* (FFI). The national HQ was led by Malleret-Joinville, a Communist, and it was another Communist, Pierre Villon, who headed the military committee set up by the CNR under the name of *Comité Militaire d'Action* (COMAC).

The stress on national unity – the PCF's central slogan throughout the Resistance period – is interpreted by many non-Communist critics as stemming from the party's wish to make a united France a reliable ally of the Soviet Union. The explanation of Communist policy as Moscow-inspired is, as usual, too facile to be entirely satisfactory. We have already seen that (before the recent emergence of 'Euro-communism') all CPs regarded the USSR's interests as being complementary to those of their own countries and took them into account, but as one factor only, admittedly an important one. Moreover, the disentangling of motives is always a tricky business. Whatever the PCF's real motives were – which we have no way of knowing – its leadership justified the national unity policy on strictly French and Marxist grounds. The French grounds were that the country's liberation required a national insurrection, a view which de Gaulle himself – whatever *his* motives – also endorsed. The Marxist grounds were that the class struggle had taken on a national character: the main enemy of the French working class, German fascism, was also the enemy of the French nation. It was therefore both possible and necessary for a working-class party to focus its attention on national unity as the precondition for a successful national insurrection. The party also made the point that a national insurrection could not lead to a return to pre-war conditions; it would lead to a 'new democracy', involving far-reaching social and political changes. That this was not a pious wish could be seen, the PCF argued, from the advanced character of the CNR's programme, to which all its members were committed.

However, the PCF also thought that within the Resistance, the class struggle had not vanished, since the movement included 'exploiters' as well as 'exploited', but that it was largely waged around issues which were connected with the conduct of the national struggle. The most important of these issues were whether partisans should kill Germans or not, whether rural *maquis* were better than urban ones, and above all, whether liberation should come from inside or from outside. On the first two issues, the PCF believed that its

methods were more readily accepted by the working class and the people because they relied on popular initiative and involvement, whereas they were frowned upon by de Gaulle and the western allies (both 'bourgeois') for precisely the same reason. The third issue was the most controversial of all because the Communists, on the one hand, and the Gaullists and the Anglo-Americans, on the other, had different political philosophies and different post-war aims. The PCF worked for France's own liberation so that her future government should not owe its existence to the Allies, with the result that the party would have a leading role in it in view of its Resistance record. It did not, however, expect to hold power alone, and was not even planning to do so since it was preparing a national, not a proletarian insurrection. Whether its leaders secretly hoped that a 'progressive' government would quickly make way for a socialist one is not impossible, but that could only be music for the distant future. As for de Gaulle, his aim was that a regular French army should help to free France, so that a regular government headed by himself could take over. Finally, the western governments were suspicious of both the Communists and de Gaulle, of the first because they were friends of Russia, and of the latter because he was too independent, and they gave up their AMGOT plans only when they had no option.

Finally, in the cultural and ideological field, the PCF's policy was to involve intellectuals in the battle against Nazism. In 1943 it was instrumental in bringing about the *Comité National des Ecrivains* (CNE), a body which writers of all views were invited to join. Many of them did, including Sartre, Camus and the Catholic François Mauriac, who were active in it, and Valéry and Duhamel, who supported it. *Les Lettres Françaises*, founded by Jacques Decour, and edited by Aragon after Decour had been arrested and shot, published articles, poems and stories by France's leading writers. A significant number of intellectuals decided to join the PCF. The most famous was the physicist, Joliot-Curie, and the poet, Eluard, who was in fact returning to the fold, a clear sign that both he and the party had changed. Picasso was close and joined in October 1944. Together with those who were already Communists, these newcomers contributed to the cultural Resistance, a movement as important in its own right as military Resistance. Among the painters, one must mention (in addition to Picasso) Matisse and Jean Lurçat; among the short story writers (all the stories had a strong anti-Nazi content), Aragon and his wife, Elsa Triolet, although she was never nominally a party member.

But pride of place must go to the poets, Aragon, Eluard, and others, because poems could be passed from hand to hand and learnt by heart. It is also worth noting that the PCF's intellectual activities included publication and distribution of the Marxist classics, a move dictated by the wish to provide new members with stronger reasons to remain in the party than their involvement in the Resistance, important though that was.

The PCF and de Gaulle

The relations between the PCF and de Gaulle require separate treatment because they illustrate remarkably well the double aspect of the party's policy since 1941, namely, waging the struggle against German fascism first, but also – and, in the Communist view, because of this – waging the struggle within the Resistance. The latter might be termed the secondary class struggle, but it was, from the PCF's point of view, inevitable and important. It was inevitable because the 'bourgeoisie', even if some of its sections are patriotic, has different interests from those of the working class; it was important in order to ensure that the main class struggle against Hitler fascism should result in a strengthening of the French working class and 'its party'.

Although the Free French Committee, set up in London under de Gaulle's leadership in September 1941, was immediately recognised by the Soviet Union (and much later by Britain and the USA), the PCF tended to ignore de Gaulle until April 1942. *L'Humanité* often spoke of the necessary unity between 'Gaullists' and Communists, but it did not refer to the general himself because, as we have seen, he was initially hostile to internal resistance and to the shooting of German soldiers. However, on 18 April 1942 he declared that 'national liberation cannot be separated from national insurrection', which was, word for word, the PCF's own formula. Both sides then felt the need for a rapprochement, despite their mutual suspicions of each other. In January 1943 the PCF sent Fernand Grenier to represent it on the London Committee, and de Gaulle welcomed the move by writing to the CC that he saw this as further proof of the Communist 'will to contribute to the liberation of our country'. A month later, he again wrote to the party, saying that 'Communists play a major role in the Resistance'. Despite these gestures of good will, the new PCF–Gaullist co-operation did not put an end to clashes between the two 'allies'. In a way, the reverse happened, because disagreements were no longer argued about in a general polemical way, to score points as it

were, but became part and parcel of the debates concerning the working out of joint day-to-day tactics.

Events in North Africa provided special opportunities for co-operation as well as for clashes. After the Allied landing on 8 November 1942, it had been hoped that a provisional French government would be set up in Algeria, which was technically part of France. However, Britain and the USA preferred to deal with Darlan, Pétain's envoy, whom they put in charge. Both de Gaulle and the Communists voiced their misgivings. When the Germans occupied the whole of France on 11 November, on the pretext of 'saving' her from Anglo-American invasion, again de Gaulle and the PCF reacted in the same way: the general pointed out that the Pétain government had lost all claims to independence, and *L'Humanité* wrote that 'the Vichy clique' had sunk 'even deeper into dishonour'. On 27 November, the scuttling of the French fleet at Toulon to prevent it from being taken over by the Germans drew praise from both Gaullists and Communists. On Christmas Eve Darlan was assassinated, and the Allies appointed General Giraud (who was senior to de Gaulle) as High Commissioner. De Gaulle was naturally incensed, and the PCF cautiously supported him. In June 1943 the *Comité Français de Libération Nationale* (CFLN) was set up, with de Gaulle and Giraud as joint presidents. The CFLN was in effect a provisional government, and it took that name in June 1944, but it was not recognised as such by the western allies. Only the USSR acknowledged it as 'the representative of the state interests of the French Republic'. On 17 September, the CFLN set up a Consultative Assembly in Algiers in which all shades of opinion were represented, including the Communists. In November Giraud retired, and de Gaulle was left in sole control. The way lay open for the PCF to enter the CFLN.

Although the party was faced with the historic choice of joining what was in effect a government, it did not show the reluctance it had displayed in 1936. De Gaulle, however, proved difficult, not because he did not want the Communists but because he insisted on nominating his own ministers instead of merely accepting those whom the party delegated. The conflict lasted a few months, but it was finally resolved with the help of a compromise: on 4 April 1944, two Communists joined the provisional government; one was de Gaulle's own choice, Fernand Grenier, who became Commissar[57] for Air, and the other was the party's nominee, François Billoux, who became Com-

missar of State. Ironically, the most serious clash occurred between de Gaulle and Grenier. It was caused by the Vercors tragedy. The Vercors *maquis* in Haute Savoie was not a Communist group, but a Gaullist one. In June 1944 it was ordered by Soustelle and Passy (two of the general's men) not to leave its base in order to attack but to stay put and wait. Unfortunately, the Germans did not wait, and after surrounding the area with greatly superior forces, they easily defeated the Vercors *maquisards*, 750 of whom died. From Algiers, Grenier had tried to send an air squadron, but he could not get de Gaulle's signature in time. When he learned what had happened, he called a press conference, in the course of which he stated that he dissociated himself from this *attentisme*, which he called 'a crime against France'. On the same day, he sent a letter to de Gaulle. The general was furious and demanded withdrawal of the letter and an end to all public criticisms. After a hurried consultation with Billoux, Grenier bowed down, and so was kept in the government. Fauvet remarks that the party 'sacrificed its convictions on the altar of *union sacrée*'.[58] A fair comment, but perhaps the use of *union sacrée* was a trifle uncharitable.

The PCF and France's liberation

The PCF's role in France's liberation is linked to its views about the national insurrection. According to the Communists, the insurrection had to be independent in relation to the Allied military operations and it had to involve both military and non-military action. The first aspect carried as a consequence that the timing did not depend on the speed of Anglo–American advance, but as *La Vie du Parti* put it in August 1944, 'on the balance of forces between the enemy and the mass of patriots'. In each area the local population had to decide whether the situation was favourable or not, and there should be 'small mobile units, countless and elusive'. The second aspect meant that the insurrection, as viewed by the PCF, should be a popular uprising, combining military action and other forms of struggle (in which the *milices patriotiques* had a crucial role to play), all converging on an armed uprising. The Gaullists condemned the militias as 'irregular bodies', and de Gaulle suspected that the Communists were using them to strengthen their own influence. On the issue of military operations, Gaullists and Communists frequently clashed. For example, after the opening of the Second Front, the Gaullist Chaban-Delmas told COMAC that France should show her independence in

the political sphere, 'whilst displaying strict discipline in the military sphere', a statement which his listeners understood as meaning that there should be no military action before orders to this effect had been issued by the Allies and the French regular forces. They replied that independence had to be won in action. De Gaulle counter-charged by saying that 'guerilla activities', as he chose to call them, were unnecessary since regular forces could be trusted to defeat the enemy. He privately felt that they were also politically dubious since they enabled the Communists to play a leading role which they were sure to exploit later. For these reasons, General Koenig, whom de Gaulle had put in charge of co-ordinating the actions of the FFI with the Allied plans, sent the following instruction on 14 June: 'Slow down to the utmost, repeat slow down to the utmost guerilla activities.' The COMAC and the FTP ignored the order, and were followed by many resistance groups, so that in the end, on 14 August Koenig finally agreed to put the FFI under COMAC's supreme command.

The most important insurrection occurred in Paris. The Allied forces did not expect to reach the capital before the end of September, but the local population was in a defiant mood, which was encouraged by Communist propaganda, but was not exclusively due to it. In July there were hunger marches, a railwaymen's strike, and especially a huge demonstration on the 14th, attended by 100,000 people, whom the police were unable to disperse. By the end of July the growth of the *milices* and the increase in the number of acts of sabotage induced the PCF to decide that the insurrection was ripe. On 18 August the city was paralysed by a CGT–CFTC-inspired strike, and the PCF CC issued an appeal calling for an uprising. On the 19th, the Communist Rol-Tanguy, who was in charge of the Paris FFI, decreed a general mobilisation, and the Paris Liberation Committee urged the people to get arms from the Germans themselves by attacking lorries carrying arms and ammunition. De Gaulle's delegates, Parodi and Chaban-Delmas, felt compelled to support the call for an insurrection. According to Fauvet, they did so in order 'to preserve unity, whilst urging the Americans to hurry'.[59] The German commander, von Choltitz, tried to cut his losses by offering to talk to the Anglo-Americans and the regular Gaullist forces rather than to 'hooligans [*voyous*], terrorists and Communists'. Although talks did take place, at which the Germans offered to evacuate the capital in return for a 'truce', and although as a result, the Gaullists instructed the FFI to cease fire, the Parisian insurgents went ahead unabated. On 21

August, after a stormy meeting, the CNR decided to reject the truce, a decision which even initial waverers supported in view of the Germans' attack on the *mairie* of Saint-Ouen, in the course of which ninety people were killed. In the meantime, most of Paris had already been liberated, and *L'Humanité*, which reappeared openly on the same day, urged continuation of the fight. From London, de Gaulle ordered Leclerc, the commander of the Free French Forces armoured division, to hurry: 'Act quickly, let there not be another *Commune*.' When Leclerc entered the French capital on the 24th it was practically a free city that he entered. On the 25th, von Choltitz unconditionally surrendered in the presence of Leclerc and Rol-Tanguy. On the 26th, de Gaulle organised a triumphal parade down the Champs-Elysées to Notre Dame. Controversies about the Parisian insurrection and the PCF's role in it went on well after the war. De Gaulle claimed in his Memoirs that the Communists wanted to head the insurrection and proclaim a *Commune*, but Fauvet points out that there is no evidence of such a Communist intention, adding that 'no historian, not even anti-Communist, has ever suggested it'.[60] Fauvet also recalls that four years earlier, Weygand had preferred surrender to the Germans to the prospect of a Communist take-over, and he comments: 'What a strange reversal of fate, or beyond the gulf, what a deep community of thought!'[61] As to whether the truce would have saved lives, opinions differed and continue to differ. Those who favoured a truce argue that it was a chance worth taking, whereas their opponents assert that the Germans had already shown they would exploit the situation and kill many French people.

Although most of France was freed by the end of September, the war went on until 8 May 1945. The PCF's policy during its last stages is summed up in the slogan put out by the party in August 1944, *S'unir – combattre – travailler*. The first of these aims was not new, and the last one concerned mostly the post-war future, but the stress on 'fight' carried the seeds of further conflicts between Communists and Gaullists since it affected the kind of army France needed to wage the war. The clash became particularly sharp when de Gaulle insisted on disbanding all 'irregular' military units. In order to avoid a head-on confrontation, the PCF reluctantly supported his decision, but publicly regretted that the former partisans had not been incorporated into the French army. After much heart-searching, the party also decided to support de Gaulle's demand for the dissolution of the various liberation committees which had sprung up throughout the land, on

the ground that this form of 'dual power' was not conducive to stability. Although Communists never regarded the committees as new soviets, they began by arguing that as popular bodies they could strengthen the regular government. However, since de Gaulle was adamant on that point, the party gave in, and Maurice Thorez (who had returned to France in November 1944)[62] won the day on the Central Committee, despite, it is believed, the opposition of some other leaders. Discussing the reasons for this move, Fauvet writes that 'as is frequently the case with Communists, the simplest explanation happens to be the truest', i.e. that the party had realised the uselessness of ' . . . all these committees which lose their authority as soon as *préfets* regain theirs [an allusion to the fact that de Gaulle had installed his own men as *préfets* in all regions] and of all these militias which are more cumbersome than effective'.[63]

The only other issue which requires brief examination is whether there could have been a socialist revolution in 1945. Trotskyists assert that, once again, the PCF 'betrayed the workers' by not attempting to make one, and a number of non-Communist scholars[64] believe that it was part of the deal made between Stalin and the west that European Communists should support broad coalitions. The PCF's argument on this issue is naturally based on its presentation of 'the balance of class forces'. The bourgeoisie, it says, *could* continue to rule, because its Gaullist wing had supplanted its collaborationist wing and had effectively captured all the organs of state power;[65] moreover, there were two million Allied soldiers in France, and they would have certainly intervened to prevent a Communist uprising, as they did in Greece in December 1944. As for the French people, they did not *want* further conflicts; they longed for a return to peaceful conditions, and to most of them the liberation was its own reward, carrying with it the promise of a better France. In his Memoirs, Duclos asserts that '. . . if, through blindness or presumption, we had allowed ourselves to be dragged into an adventurist forcible operation, we would have been abandoned by a number of our own members . . .'.[66]

Notes

1 There were seven articles. The first one pledged non-resort to force, the second pledged neutrality if one country was at war, the third one mentioned consultations, the fourth one bade the signatories not to join a group of powers directed against one of them, the fifth one declared that all differences would be settled by an exchange of views, the sixth one



stipulated that the pact would last ten years, and the final one that it would be ratified without delay.

2 The secret clauses concerned the delimitation of 'spheres of influence' for each side.

3 Ceretti, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

4 A. Cobban, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

5 Fauvet, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

6 Jean Touchard (cf. *La Gauche en France depuis 1900*, Seuil, 1977) points out that in the version of the speeches given by one of the accused, Florimond Bonte, in 1949, some references to 'the imperialist war' were omitted. This Stalinist way of writing history can only be condemned.

7 The two countries claimed that they had established a 'firm foundation for peace in eastern Europe' and called on Britain and France to stop the war in the west.

8 At the time of the French Revolution Pitt was England's Prime Minister and Cobourg a Prussian marshal. The aristocratic *émigrés* were derisively nicknamed 'the Pitts and the Cobourgs'.

9 Reported by Aragon, in *L'Homme Communiste* (Gallimard, 1953), vol. 2, p. 296.

10 Cf. *L'Humanité*, 2 February 1940, which replied to a so-called *Radio-Huma* which had advocated sabotage and desertion by saying it was either a German station or 'one set up by the French police as a deliberate provocation'; and *L'Humanité*, 27 March 1940, which dismissed as provocative a circular warning aircraft factories to expect Communist sabotage.

11 Fauvet reports the case of three workers who were sentenced to death for sabotage in May 1940 and who declared their membership of the Communist Youth organisation. He adds: 'The party never spoke about them' (*op. cit.*, p. 262).

12 Cf. A. Rossi, *Les communistes français pendant la drôle de guerre* (Les Iles d'Or, 1951), p. 207.

13 The Soviet–Finnish war started in October 1939 after the breakdown of negotiations over a frontier adjustment. The western powers condemned the Soviet resort to force and started to give Finland military assistance, but the Finns capitulated in March 1940.

14 Quoted by A. Rossi, *op. cit.*, p. 141 and also p. 207 (emphasis in the original).

15 R. Bourderon, article in *Recherches et Débats*, supplement to *Cahiers D'Histoire de l'Institut Maurice Thorez*, no. 29–30 (1979), p. 26.

16 Fauvet denies this but adds that after the banning of the party, Thorez had every reason to fear arrest (cf. *op. cit.*, p. 246).

17 Cf. Ceretti, *op. cit.*, pp. 197–202; cf. also Fauvet, *op. cit.*, pp. 245–6.

18 Frossard and *Le Populaire* claimed that Thorez was in Germany. He hotly denied this in *L'Humanité*, 6 May 1940.

19 The total number of Parisian issues between 1939 and 1944 was 317. Some special issues, not numbered, must also be included. As for the provincial issues, their total is not known. In 1975 the Editions Sociales reproduced all the Parisian issues in the two-volume *L'Humanité clan-*

destine. All references to the wartime *L'Humanité* are to this edition. The volumes also contain explanatory notes and comments, to which I am greatly indebted for my analysis of the paper's content.

20 The fact that these five issues are missing is mentioned by the editors of *L'Humanité clandestine*, who add that their absence is due to 'obvious reasons' (*op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 155), meaning presumably the disappearance of many documents after the Germans entered France. Whatever the reasons, these issues cannot be found anywhere. Rossi mentions *one* of them (the issue dated 26 May 1940) but admits that he has not seen it and that it was quoted by Daladier in a 1946 parliamentary speech. If Rossi admits to not having seen the issue concerned (cf. *op. cit.*, p. 288), one may safely assume that it is indeed missing. One may also assume that Daladier or one of his friends probably saw it when it came out and quoted from it from memory.

21 Cf. Maurice Thorez, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

22 Cf. J. Duclos, *Mémoires*, vol. 3 (I), pp. 40–1.

23 This novel, first published in 1950–1 and revised in 1966, is partly fiction and partly history. The relevant incident is related on pp. 296–9, 313–17, 379–81, and 388–91 of the *Livre de Poche* edition (Editeurs Français Réunis 1967), vol. 4.

24 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 390–1.

25 Fauvet, *op. cit.*, p. 273.

26 Cf. *L'Humanité*, 20 May 1940.

27 *Outline History of the Communist International*, p. 461.

28 J. Suret-Canale, in *France Nouvelle*, 6–12 October 1979.

29 *Outline History*, p. 460.

30 It was so called because Paris being in the occupied zone, the French government moved over to Vichy.

31 R. Bourderon, 'Eté 1940', in *Cahiers du Communisme* (May 1980), p. 22.

32 Cf. J. Duclos, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

33 H. Jourdain, in *Révolution* (no. 16, 20–26 June 1980), p. 31.

34 For example, Pierre Villon wanted to break with the party leadership (cf. *Cahiers*, *op. cit.*, p. 40).

35 Quoted by A. Rossi in *Physiologie du Parti Communiste Français* (Self, 1948), pp. 395–6.

36 Forged issues of *L'Humanité* and forged pamphlets and leaflets purporting to come from the PCF did appear throughout the period.

37 Fauvet, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

38 Cf. *L'Humanité clandestine* (comments), vol. 1, p. 181; cf. also J. Duclos, *op. cit.*, p. 55; finally, cf. *Cahiers d'Histoire de l'IRM* (summer 1983), pp. 62–5 and 160–2.

39 Fauvet, *op. cit.*, p. 275.

40 Cf. F. Crémieux and J. Estager, *Sur le Parti 1939–1940* (Messidor, 1983) and P. Villon, *Résistant de la première heure* (Editions Sociales, 1983).

41 Cf. J. Duclos, *op. cit.*, pp. 57 and 73.

42 Quoted by R. Paxton, in *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order 1940–44* (Knopf, 1972), p. 226.

43 *Francs-Tireurs* (free lances) was the name taken by guerilla warriors in the 1870–1 Franco-Prussian war. *Partisans* was the name taken by guerilla warriors in the 1918–20 Russian civil war and subsequently by anti-Nazi fighters in occupied Europe.
44 Cf. *Recherches Internationales* (September–December 1958), pp. 69–90.
45 Fauvet, *op. cit.*, p. 296.
46 Lecoeur was expelled from the PCF in 1955. In *Le PCF et la Résistance* (Plon, 1968), he claims that the CC was against the strike because it was anti-German. Although the CC may have been against it initially, for other reasons, it publicly welcomed it, and furthermore, there were other anti-German activities conducted by the Communists at the time.
47 Cf. his assertion that the PCF was 'the main corps and the leading wing' of the Fifth Column! (*Les communistes français* . . . , p. 345).
48 Fauvet, *op. cit.*, p. 292.
49 J. Touchard, *op. cit.*, p. 257.
50 Henri Noguères, *Histoire de la Résistance en France*, vol. 1 (Robert Laffont, 1967), p. 438.
51 *Ibid.*, p. 439.
52 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 447–51 for J. L. Vigier's dissentient view.
53 Cf. *France Nouvelle* (nos. 1763, 1764, 1768, 1769, and 1771–1979), *Cahiers du Communisme* (August–September 1979 and May 1980), *Cahiers d'Histoire de l'Institut Maurice Thorez* (nos. 29–30, 1979), *La Pensée* (April 1980), *Révolution* (no. 16, 20–6 June 1980).
54 The expression was first coined by Elsa Triolet in one of her wartime short stories and then taken up by the party.
55 Unlike the *maquis*, which were rural hiding places for partisans (and later came to loosely describe all resistance groups), the FTP were urban-based and working-class-based.
56 Fauvet, *op. cit.*, p. 310.
57 The use of the word 'commissar' was not intended to have a Bolshevik ring (!) but merely to indicate the provisional character of the government.
58 Fauvet, *op. cit.*, pp. 332–3.
59 *Ibid.*, p. 333.
60 *Ibid.*, p. 340.
61 *Ibid.*
62 As he was technically a deserter, he needed to be pardoned before he could return to France.
63 Fauvet, *op. cit.*, pp. 344–5.
64 Cf. Robert Aron, *Histoire de la libération de la France* (Fayard, 1959); J. Chapsal, *La vie politique en France depuis 1940* (PUF, 1960); Philip M. Williams, *Crisis and Compromise: Politics in the 4th Republic* (Longmans, 1964).
65 De Gaulle appointed only two Communist *préfets*. (*Préfets* are the administrators of French *départements* and are directly appointed by the government.)
66 J. Duclos, *op. cit.*, vol. 3 (II), pp. 303–4.

CHAPTER 5

Rise and fall: from ministers (1945–7) to cold war 'pariahs' (1947–58)

Rise: the PCF as 'a party of government' (1945–7)

Both France and the PCF emerged from the war with a mixture of strengths and weaknesses. For France, the chief strength was that, together with her allies, she had won the war and liberated her territory – hence the name by which the 1945–6 period is known, *la Libération*. The chief weaknesses were psychological and economic. The scars left by the war took a long time to heal, and the state of the economy was grim: although the country's economic potential remained great, all plants stood in need of modernisation, especially in the coal industry. In addition, a number of cities had been destroyed, transport was at a standstill, industrial production had sunk to 35 per cent of the 1938 level, agricultural production was not faring much better, and finally, inflation and unemployment were rising. For the PCF, the main strengths were increased membership (over half a million in June 1945 and three-quarters of a million in December of the same year), increased prestige earned by the Communist Resistance record, increased industrial influence (for the first time in France, the revolutionary trend was stronger than the reformist trend), increased electoral support (the PCF became '*le premier parti de France*' in terms of votes), and increased maturity. The main weaknesses were that many Communists had died in the battle, including some very able leaders in all fields, and that the party was not yet fully equipped to master a swift-changing, unprecedented situation.

The unprecedented character of the situation lay in the precarious balance of forces in the world and in France itself. Ostensibly, the wartime co-operation between the west and the USSR was maintained, but there were signs of a growing rift. Throughout Europe the left was striding ahead (including Britain where the 1945 General Election resulted in a Labour landslide), but the conservative forces were still powerful and were biding their time. In France the old

ruling classes, discredited by collaboration and weakened by the confiscation of 'traitors' property' (e.g. the Renault factories) and the nationalisation of some major firms (e.g. the northern coalfields), could still rely on considerable wealth and on some government ministers; moreover, they had discovered under Vichy the benefits of state intervention and they entertained the hope (which proved to be fully justified later) that it might work in their favour. The working class had emerged as a great national force because of its contribution to the Resistance and it had two powerful political parties to represent it, the PCF and the SFIO, but they had to reckon with a mighty challenger, the *Mouvement Républicain Populaire* (MRP), which was a Christian-democratic party supported by the middle classes and very loyal to de Gaulle. This meant that, initially, neither the bourgeoisie nor the working class could hope to govern alone.

The way in which the PCF reacted to this novel situation is best seen by examining three issues – its relations with the SFIO, its parliamentary and government attitudes, and the discrepancy between its theory and its practice. During the war the SFIO had not thought that it was called upon to play a role in the Resistance *as a party*. Individual members were encouraged to join various Resistance groups, and a great many did so, often displaying great courage. The groups they joined were generally Gaullist-inspired, but this did not prevent joint action with the Communists, so that at the end of the war the majority of rank-and-filers felt that 'the Résistance élan was profound enough and intense enough'[1] to allow for continued and even closer co-operation. This may explain why, towards the end of 1943, the SFIO clandestine leadership offered to discuss with the PCF the possibility of achieving 'organic unity', and that the offer was repeated in November 1944 by the first legal congress of the party. It was the first time since Tours that such a move had come from the Socialists rather than the Communists. It resulted in the formation of a *comité d'entente* between the two parties, whose double task was to organise united action and to prepare 'organic unity'. However, at a closed meeting of the SFIO executive on 21 December, the majority spoke against reunification. Vincent Auriol described the SFIO offer as 'a means of warding off a possible manoeuvre on the part of the Communist party', and Jules Moch said it had been made simply to avoid bearing the responsibility for disunity.

For its part the PCF took the offer seriously, and on 12 June 1945

L'Humanité published the draft Unity Charter of the future party, to be named *Parti Ouvrier Français* in memory of Jules Guesde's POF, the PCF's and the SFIO's common ancestor. Like its 1934 predecessor, this draft charter would have involved the SFIO's ideological capitulation, since it demanded that the *Parti Ouvrier* be based on Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, that it should adopt 'democratic centralism', and that it should draw inspiration from 'the majestic socialist victories' of the USSR. However, one should note that in spite of this, the draft included the assertion that French socialism would be built 'in the conditions which are peculiar to the situation and to the national character of our people'. The answer of the SFIO leadership was negative. In a series of articles which appeared in *Le Populaire* in July and August 1945, Blum explained their stand by saying that in the PCF, 'there still lingers a dependence on the USSR . . . which is a mixture of habit and passion'. At a private meeting of the SFIO executive he added another reason, the fear of becoming part of 'a huge apparatus whose organs, whose function, whose objectives are always wrapped up in some mystery'. The SFIO congress rejected the PCF's charter and all moves towards 'organic unity', but it decided to keep united action. The following congress, held in August 1946, went even further. Although the victor was a left-winger, Guy Mollet, and although 'a community of class interests' was declared to exist between the SFIO and the PCF, organic unity was ruled out of order so long as 'international Communist parties' remained 'subordinated to the Russian state', and united action was said to be 'indispensable', but only 'in specific circumstances'. Moreover, the congress decided to wind up the *comité d'entente* between the two parties. Nearly ten years after the collapse of the Popular Front, the high hopes of left unity were shattered once again. To say that the SFIO was chiefly (though not exclusively) responsible for this is not to accuse it of 'betrayal' (as the PCF predictably did), but simply to recognise the fact that, in the post-war period, the Socialist leadership had become most unhappy about the spread of Communist influence in France and about Soviet expansion in eastern Europe, and so had chosen to co-operate with the MRP at home and with the USA abroad. The PCF's share of the blame was that it had not made any substantial concessions with regard to organic unity, but on the issue of united action, it had really tried to play the game, if only because it had everything to gain from it.

As for the main SFIO charge against the Communists – emotional attachment to the USSR – it was not unjustified, but the extreme way in which it was expressed by the Socialist leaders prevented them from acknowledging the potential as well as the real changes which were taking place in the PCF. One of the ways in which western Socialists *might* have helped the Communists to get rid of their uncritical loyalty to the USSR was united action, in the course of which the Communists' boast that they were autonomous would have been put to the test. In France the formation of a PCF–SFIO government, which, as we shall see, was demanded on four occasions by the PCF and invariably rejected by the SFIO, might have compelled the Communists to take an independent French stand, if only in order not to lose all credibility with French public opinion. Moreover, in 1946, the PCF had in fact taken a stand which was not that of the Soviet government. For unlike the USSR and German Communists, it had come out in favour of the internationalisation of the Ruhr and of France's control of the Saar province. The differences were only tactical, but this alone was new. So was the open acknowledgement that the PCF's attitude was *not* that of Molotov, as was spelt out by Georges Cogniot when he told Blum that 'It is true that French policy differs from that of the USSR. No one is thinking of denying this divergence. Léon Blum does not need to bring out some *deus ex machina* from the Kremlin to arbitrate between French Communists and German Communists. . . . [French Communists] take their stand exclusively on the basis of the country's interests . . . '.[2] The same kind of cautious autonomy was expressed by Togliatti and the PCI when they demanded that Trieste should remain Italian, although Stalin and Tito wanted it for Yugoslavia. It is just possible that a more understanding attitude on the part of western social-democracy might have strengthened the trend towards greater independence in the PCF and the PCI.[3] How far it would or could have gone we cannot tell, but there is little doubt that the Socialists' refusal to co-operate with the Communists helped their rivals to become more intransigent.

Blames SFIO

The Liberation period was one in which the French people were frequently called upon to go to the polls in order to exercise their democratic rights. For the PCF, all these elections revealed two trends which were bound to dictate its policies. One was that the party was scoring impressive victories (of which the most significant will be analysed below), but the other was that it still commanded minority

support and thus could not hope to hold power except through a coalition. At first, the party envisaged this coalition as a very broad one and as a continuation of the 'national unity' achieved during the Resistance. At the CC Ivry meeting of January 1945, while the war was still on, Thorez had forcefully denounced the suggestion, made by the *gauchistes* and some Communists, that there ought to be 'dual power' in France (the liberation committees, the *milices* and the FTP existing alongside and independently of the central government) as a prelude to a socialist revolution. (That had been the situation in Russia between March and October 1917.) He insisted, and the CC supported him, that 'there is only one single state, one single army and one single police'. At the tenth party congress, held at the end of June 1945, he made the point again and added that 'the recovery of France cannot be the task of a single party' but 'of the whole nation' and that the continued existence of 'a government of broad national and democratic unity' was, as far as the PCF was concerned, 'the most fortunate perspective for our country'.

How to account for this stress on national unity? Among non-Communist scholars there are two different hypotheses put forward. One, cautiously suggested by René Rémond and Maurice Agulhon,[4] is that the PCF was wavering between a kind of 'neo-sovietism' and a kind of 'neo-Popular Front'. If such hesitations existed among the PCF membership, the party leaders certainly put an end to them, even if they themselves had been unsure for a while, especially between October 1944 (when both the PCF and the CNR objected to de Gaulle's dissolution of the *milices patriotiques*) and January 1945 (when the PCF CC accepted this dissolution at the Ivry meeting already mentioned). The other hypothesis is that of Robert Aron who writes that, having failed to take power alone at the time of the liberation of Paris, the Communists then endeavoured to occupy key posts in the state machine in order to stage 'what will be known later as the Prague coup'.[5] (The 'Prague coup' refers to the fact that in February 1948 the Czech CP exploited a constitutional crisis to put its own leader at the head of the government.) This hypothesis is not very satisfactory for two reasons. One is that, like all hypotheses, it rests on assumptions rather than proven facts. The *fact* that the 'Prague coup' succeeded does not prove that a similar coup was contemplated in France by the PCF. For – and this is the second reason – the success of the Czech CP was due in no small measure to the fact that Czechoslovakia was part of the Soviet bloc, whereas France was in the

western bloc, under the protection of Anglo–American armies, and as far as is known, Britain and the USA had not suddenly converted to Marxism–Leninism and made the dictatorship of the proletariat their primary goal! The Communists of all countries may be Machiavelian crooks, but they are also realists. And as realists, French Communists must have known that they had no chance of getting away with a coup. They knew that their only chance was to take part in a coalition within which they could hope to make inroads into the capitalist system.

If we now look at the PCF's own explanation of its stand, both that given at the time and that of modern Communist historians,[6] we shall see that it boils down to the belief that national unity was the only sound policy in 1945 because it corresponded to the then balance of forces. Before going any further, one must say that, of course, the party's justification is not to be taken at face value. All that historians can do is to report it, and afterwards, if at all possible, to try and assess how far the facts tend to support it. This has been the present writer's approach throughout these pages, and his only excuse for reminding readers of it is that the point cannot be made too often. The PCF's chief argument in favour of a government of national unity was that, given the respective strength of social and political forces, no other government was possible, at least until the country had given itself stable institutions. In a sense it was a novel form of waging the class struggle, for the alternative was a government *against* the people. Remembering that in March 1945 the Pope had declared that 'the democratisation of the economy [was] threatened to an equal degree by the economic despotism of the anonymous masses as by private capital', the party concluded that the Vatican (and the bourgeoisie in general) relied on the MRP to contain 'the anonymous masses' by occupying ministerial posts and that the same masses relied on the Communists and the left to contain the bourgeoisie by checking them inside their former preserve – the government. In addition, foreign policy considerations played an important part. The preservation of the anti-Hitler coalition between the west and the Soviet Union was deemed indispensable to prevent the resurgence of German militarism (which was a threat to both France and the USSR according to the PCF), and as all parties were nominally committed to such a foreign policy, co-operation among them was regarded as possible and useful. A final factor was that Communists thought that Britain and the USA would have welcomed a government which excluded the PCF, and the latter saw no reason to oblige them, although it did not

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openly say so. One must agree that *from a Communist point of view*, the PCF's policy made sense, and that it is unnecessary to look for hidden motives in order to account for it. Non-Communists are obviously entitled to criticise the policy on the ground that it was designed to strengthen the Communist party – this was indeed one of its aims – and as such was bad for France. But here we enter the field of value judgements, and these depend on different people's political philosophies.

The first important electoral consultation was the April–May 1945 municipal elections, at which the SFIO refused to draw up joint Resistance lists as proposed by the PCF. Communist candidates went to the poll under the banner of *Union républicaine et antifasciste* and secured a high number of votes. The next test was the October 1945 referendum and the elections for a Constituent Assembly. The referendum put two questions to the people, first, whether they wanted a new constitution, and secondly, whether they wanted the government 'to carry on until a new constitution [was] drawn up'. A Yes answer to the first question meant the setting up of a new republic (the Fourth Republic as it came to be known), and nearly all shades of opinion advocated it. A Yes answer to the second question meant giving de Gaulle a free hand in the sense that his government would not be controlled by an elected assembly until the latter had drawn up a draft constitution. For this reason, the PCF came out in favour of a No vote, whereas all other parties backed de Gaulle. The people's verdict was Yes to the first question by 96 per cent to 4 per cent, and Yes to the second question by 66½ per cent to 33½ per cent. In the Constituent Assembly the PCF obtained 26.2 per cent of the votes cast and 151 seats, the SFIO 23.8 per cent and 133 seats, and the MRP 24.9 per cent and 141 seats. The PCF's score was the highest of any single party, and it represented an 11 per cent advance on its 1936 result. The results of the referendum and of the elections brought about an important tactical change in the PCF's stand, for they revealed three things – one, that the PCF was a strong force, two, that the PCF and the SFIO had an absolute majority, and three, that the PCF was able to influence a significant number of people outside its own supporters to vote No in the referendum. On the strength of the election results, the Communist leadership switched their stand on the composition of the government and proposed the formation of a 'democratic government led by Socialists and Communists', arguing that the two working-class parties now commanded an absolute

majority. However, this was not presented as the end of 'national unity', but as its continuation in a new manner: although one could do without the MRP in government, the party argued, it was necessary and possible to enlist the support of the social groups which had voted for that party. For the aim was not the building of a socialist society, but the implementation of the CNR programme which was in the interest of all classes except the 'two hundred families'.

The SFIO refused to form a government with the PCF alone, arguing that the tripartite solution (PCF, SFIO, MRP) was best suited to achieve 'an orderly revolution'. Ronald Tiersky believes that this decision was a compromise between 'the predominantly Right-leaning tendencies of the leadership and the more Left-leaning sympathies of the militants'.[7] As for the PCF, it had no option but to accept the three-party government formula, although it 'presented serious drawbacks', as Thorez subsequently put it. Soon after the election, a serious crisis broke out on 15 November, when de Gaulle refused to give the PCF one of the key ministries (Foreign Affairs, Defence, Interior) on the ground that it could not be trusted to pursue an independent foreign policy and thus could not be put in charge 'of diplomacy, which expresses it; of the army, which supports it; and of the police which protects it'. (An almost Marxist assessment of the links between the government and 'the state machine'!) The PCF vigorously protested, and as de Gaulle replied by tendering his resignation, it proposed, for the second time, the formation of a government led by Communists and Socialists. For the second time, the SFIO refused. On the 19th de Gaulle was re-appointed by the Assembly, whilst the PCF abstained. On the 21st the general announced his government's composition. There were five Communists in it, including Thorez who became a minister for the first time in his life. Tillon was put in charge of Armaments, whilst National Defence as a whole came under de Gaulle's authority. The other three Communist ministers were Billoux, Marcel Paul and Ambroise Croizat. The new government was short-lived, as de Gaulle resigned on 20 January 1946 because he wanted the head of the executive (himself) to determine policy rather than Parliament. Immediately, and for the third time, the PCF suggested a predominantly PCF–SFIO government with a small token of other left-wingers. For the third time the SFIO said No. Another tripartite government was formed under the premiership of Félix Gouin, a Socialist. It included six Communists (the above five plus Laurent Casanova), six MRP

and seven SFIO. The Communists also had two under-secretaryships, and Thorez was made one of two deputy-premiers, the other one being a member of the MRP. It is reported that he impressed Duff Cooper, who spoke of his 'personal charm', and the US senator, Vandenberg, who exclaimed: 'How can such a healthy man be a Communist?'[8]

In May 1946 the Constituent Assembly submitted its draft constitution to the people. The PCF and the SFIO supported it, but the MRP was against it because it advocated a single legislative chamber. By a narrow majority of about ten million votes (40 per cent) against about nine million (36 per cent) and about six million abstentions (24 per cent) the French people rejected the draft. On 2 June a second Constituent Assembly was elected, in which the PCF had 146 seats (26 per cent of the poll), the SFIO 115 seats (21.1 per cent) and the MRP 160 seats (28.1 per cent). A new government was formed by Georges Bidault (MRP), which included seven Communists (the newcomer was René Arthaud), six SFIO and eight MRP. Thorez and Gouin were the two deputy-premiers. In October the amended draft constitution was narrowly approved by about nine million votes (36 per cent) against nearly eight million (31.2 per cent) and nearly eight million abstentions (31.3 per cent). The new constitution provided for sex equality, the right to work, the right to strike, the right to education, the nationalisation of *de facto* monopolies, a Social Security service, and the setting up of joint management–workers workplace committees. In November a General Election for a legislative assembly gave the PCF 169 seats (28.6 per cent of the poll), the SFIO 101 seats (17.9 per cent), and the MRP 158 seats (26.4 per cent). Thorez offered himself as candidate for the premiership of a Communist–Socialist government supported by 'all Republicans', and Duclos suggested a meeting of the two parties in order to draw up a common government programme. The SFIO declined to meet the PCF (fourth Socialist refusal). The PCF CC then met at Puteaux (27 November 1946) to draw up its own programme with the aim of submitting it to Parliament. It included the modernisation of French industry, measures against price rises, a balanced budget, social legislation, the consolidation of democratic institutions, a voluntary association to replace the colonial empire, and a foreign policy based on France's co-operation with the USA, Britain and the USSR. The programme was attacked by all parties because, in the words of *Le Monde*, it had made no mention of 'indispensable sacrifices',[9] to

which *L'Humanité* retorted that it was 'the trusts and not the working people who must be asked to make indispensable sacrifices'.[10] On 3 December the SFIO National Council heard Mollet declare that 'not to vote for Thorez [was] to cut oneself off from the working class', but on the following day twenty-three Socialist deputies refused to vote for the Communist leader. He needed a minimum of 310 votes and got only 259. The next contender, Bidault, managed 240 votes only, so that in the end Blum formed a government made up of SFIO ministers exclusively. A month or so later he was succeeded by another Socialist, Paul Ramadier, who included in his cabinet five Communists (Thorez as deputy-premier, Billoux as minister of National Defence, Tillon, Croizat and Marrane), eight SFIO, five MRP, two UDSR (a small left-wing group) and two right-wing independents.

What was the nature of the PCF's electoral support in the 1945–6 period? François Goguel points out '. . . the penetration of communism into regions with a conservative orientation appears to be substantially deeper in 1946 than was the case in 1936'.[11] According to Fauvet, the PCF's post-war electoral support extended from Dunkirk to Marseilles instead of being confined to the industrial north, Paris, the centre and the south. Sociologically, the Communist electorate was made up of two main groups, 'one simply republican and mainly rural, and the other more revolutionary and essentially working-class'.[12] The members of the first group voted for Communists because their party was more to the left than any other party in the country rather than out of socialist or Marxist convictions. The support given by the second group stemmed mostly from their belief that Communists could be trusted to defend the workers' interests in their struggles against the employers; however, such support was not automatic, and there were in particular significant variations between June 1946 and November 1946, with the PCF losing ground in some industrial areas in June and regaining it six months later. One should also note that for a Communist party, electoral support does not tell the whole story. Equally important, if not more, is its ability to influence large masses of people who do not vote for its candidates. In 1944–5, the PCF was on the whole successful in this respect because it was contributing to France's liberation, whereas in 1946 it failed to win over the majority of Socialist and Christian workers and make them put sufficient pressure on the leaderships of their respective parties. That was largely due to circumstances beyond its control, the

chief one being the worsening of the international situation, but the defects of its own work and propaganda also contributed to the failure.

If we now look at the party's record in government, the two main things which French Communists themselves gained from it were experience and credibility. Both were used extensively as propaganda arguments until 1981 to try and convince people that France had already had Communist ministers and that it was not a question of the devil you don't know when it came to the issue of their return to the government. The PCF was also fond of stressing (and still is to this day) the part it played in 'the battle for production' and the 'progressive' measures introduced by its ministers. The first of these was regarded by Communists as an economic necessity (to improve living standards) and as a political duty (to ensure France's independence). To those who found it strange that a working-class party should call on workers to work harder, the leadership replied that in post-war France the situation was indeed reversed because it was 'the trusts' which were against increased production (which was not untrue) and furthermore that the working class could not be indifferent to the issue of national independence. One of the most famous illustrations of the party's stand was Thorez's appeal to the miners, made at Waziers (in the north) in July 1945. He told them that 'to produce, to dig coal [was] today the highest form of [their] class duty' because it meant strengthening 'the unity of the working class with the working people of the middle classes, with the peasant masses, in order to ensure the country's existence'. He repeated this appeal on numerous occasions in 1946. As for the measures introduced by Communist ministers, the party laid special emphasis on those of Ambroise Croizat who, as Labour minister, gave workers Social Security benefits, the return to the forty-hour week, and better wages and conditions; those of Billoux who, as Defence minister, legislated in favour of war victims; the revival of aircraft production under Tillon as minister of Aviation; the plans for the nationalisation of coal and electricity submitted by Marcel Paul when he was in charge of Industrial Production; and finally, Thorez's reform of the civil service, which gave civil servants union rights, sex equality and a decent minimum wage. Although all these measures must be credited to the government as a whole, they were often inspired by Communists, who fought hard for their adoption and implementation. The charge that the party also used its government presence to 'capture' key positions

in the state apparatus is hard to substantiate for the simple reason that the main organs of state power the armed forces, the police, finance, and the like, remained outside Communist control throughout the period. Of course, there must have been many cases of 'jobs for the boys', but in this respect, the Communists were not alone, and furthermore, the 'jobs' in question never enabled the PCF to 'threaten' the state from within.

This brings us to an important aspect of the Communist ministerial participation. The party was in office, but not in power, and on 20 January 1946, the CC warned that the two should not be confused. However, as the standard Communist criticism of Social-democratic parties was – and remains – that they are prepared to take office but not power, one is entitled to ask whether the PCF's stand was not a new variant of social-democracy. One cannot really say that it was. To begin with, a distinction must be drawn between form and content. For what was considered wrong in the past was not so much the fact of joining a 'bourgeois government', but of doing so in order to act as 'the physicians of the ailing capitalist system'. That was clearly not the PCF's intention, for in and out of the government it continued to regard 'the capitalist trusts' as the main enemy. The government itself was not assessed as 'bourgeois', but as one which rested on a precarious balance of forces, as we have seen. Neither the bourgeoisie nor the working class could be sure of victory in 1945–6, and each fought a tough 'war of positions', to use Gramsci's phrase. If after 1947 the bourgeoisie won, this was because, according to the Communists (who then openly said so), it had the support of 'international capital', of the Vatican, and of social-democracy. One may perhaps add the fact that the PCF was over-optimistic about the chances of reversing the trend.

If the PCF's practical approach had changed, but not necessarily in a social-democratic direction, the theory and practice of French social-democracy had also undergone significant alterations. For example, the SFIO no longer advocated 'class collaboration' of the pre-war type, because its leaders believed that 'the French bourgeoisie [had] lost the character of a ruling class' (Blum)[13] and that the new regime was 'a transitional regime which is no longer capitalism' (André Philip).[14] For the PCF, however, France was still a capitalist country, and the limited amount of nationalisations had not stopped the power of '*les trusts sans patrie*'. Moreover, although both the SFIO and the PCF spoke of 'national unity', they differed



about its meaning. For the Socialists, it meant that there was now 'a profound community of interests between the working class and the whole of the nation' (Blum), but for the Communists, unity meant that the working class should draw 'all democratic and national forces [in the struggle] against the trusts'.[15] Even more significant was the contrast between Blum and the PCF on the purpose of government participation. At the SFIO August 1946 congress, Blum asserted that 'when we exercise or share power within the framework of capitalist society, we do so in good faith', and he repeated the classic social-democratic formula by adding: 'We are honest, loyal managers.'[16] As for the Communists, Blum accused them of 'systematically trying to undermine the system from within the government'. In a sense, that was true, although the party always claimed that 'weakening big business' (a phrase it preferred to 'undermining the system', which smacks of subversion) was also the aim adopted by the CNR when it drew up its programme of social and political advance.



On the issue of the possible link between such an advance and the transition to socialism, the PCF's theory lagged behind its practice. To what extent the party's theoretical silence was due to Stalin's role, as Jean Elleinstein suggests,[17] it is difficult to say. For when Stalin met a British Labour Party delegation in 1946 he told them, according to Morgan Phillips's report in the *Daily Herald*, that there were two roads to socialism, the Russian road which was shorter but bloody, and the British 'parliamentary road', which was longer but more peaceful, and he added that the followers of Marx and Lenin did not recognise one single road. He made the same point to Gottwald, the Czech leader, and told him: 'Our path was shorter, faster – and it cost much blood and victims. If you can avoid it, then avoid it.'[18] Finally in 1951 the Soviet leader gave his blessing to the CPGB's new programme, *The British Road to Socialism*, which specifically stated that 'Britain will reach Socialism by her own road'. On the other hand, the same Stalin rebuked Dimitrov for having over-stressed (in his view) the differences between the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, and Dimitrov was reluctantly compelled to withdraw his remarks (1947). In any case, Stalin's role could hardly have been the only factor to account for the PCF's evasion of the issue. Other factors probably included the fact that some of the party's best theorists (e.g. Péri and Politzer) were dead, the magnitude of the practical tasks which daily faced the leadership as well as the rank-and-file, and the feeling that a debate about future socialism might be premature or



even dangerous. An illustration of the last point was an article by Victor Michaut, which appeared in the August 1945 issue of the *Cahiers du Communisme* and which asserted that talk about socialism at this stage could only 'frighten and put off a lot of ordinary people among the working peasants and the middle classes'.

On one occasion, however, the PCF squarely faced the issue of 'the French road to socialism'. That was in November 1946, when Thorez gave an interview to the London *Times*.[19] One of the questions put to him was whether he still thought 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' to be necessary. His reply was: 'The progress of democracy all over the world . . . allows one to envisage the road to socialism by other paths than those taken by the Russian Communists. In any case, the path is necessarily different for each country. We have always said and thought that the French people, with their wealth of great tradition, will find their own way towards more democracy . . . ' He also pledged that the PCF would respect the parliamentary system and stick to the democratic programme which had earned it 'the confidence of the popular masses'. Finally, unlike some of his colleagues,[20] he said that nationalisations represented 'a step forward on the way to socialism'. The significance of the interview was that it was the first time the party had spoken of a specifically French road to socialism which was democratic and, by implication, peaceful. Until 1956 it also proved to be the only time. Although Thorez's statement was printed as a pamphlet of which a million copies were distributed, no party debate took place around it, and soon afterwards it was put in cold storage and was not heard of again until de-Stalinisation had got under way.

Fall: The cold-war period (1947–55)

The cold war may be said to have started in earnest with the March 1947 proclamation of the Truman doctrine, which gave the USA the right and duty to save 'the free world', and with the September 1947 Zhdanov riposte that the world was split into two hostile camps, 'the imperialist camp', headed by the USA, and 'the anti-imperialist camp', headed by the USSR. In France, the cold war began in April 1947, when 'the French government [chose] the West over a Soviet alliance'[21] and gave up its claim on the Ruhr in exchange for the transfer of Saar coal to France under a tripartite agreement signed by France, Britain and the USA. However, the continued presence of Communist ministers in the government gave the misleading impres-



sion that international and national unity were still on. The illusion was shattered on 5 May 1947 when Ramadier dismissed PCF ministers from his cabinet. Strange though it may sound, a number of ordinary Communists felt greatly relieved because in their view – which was definitely not that of the leadership – the PM's decision had put an end to an untenable situation: over the past few months, Communists had disagreed with the government on fundamental issues such as defence, foreign policy, colonial policy and wages, and yet they had been held partly responsible for the government's actions since they were members of it. The two issues which brought matters to a head were Indo-China and wages. On Indo-China, the PCF was anxious to preserve its 'anti-imperialist stand', all the more so since the Vietnamese leaders were Communists, and after advising Ramadier not to wage war on Ho Chi Minh, it showed its disapproval by abstaining when the vote on military credits was taken in March.[22] In April PCF ministers walked out of a cabinet meeting to protest against the arrest of Madagascar MP's after a military revolt had broken out in the island. On 25 April, against the CGT's advice, the workers of two Renault plants went on strike for higher wages, as urged to do by Trotskyists and anarchists. As the strike spread, the CGT decided to make it official. The PCF leadership had to act quickly, for whatever their private views they could not run the risk of being cut off from their working-class base. At a May Day rally, addressed by Hénaff and Benoit Frachon speaking on behalf of the CGT, and by Thorez on the PCF's behalf, they pledged full support. The day before, at a cabinet meeting, Thorez had challenged the rest of the government by saying that Communists could not 'tolerate a constant lowering of the working people's living standards whilst production increases'. After a stormy meeting, which lasted nearly two days (1–2 May), Ramadier said that in view of the split among members of his government, he would ask Parliament for a vote of confidence. He got it by 360 votes to 186, all the Communists, including the ministers, having voted against him. On the strength of such a vote, he issued a decree dismissing Thorez, Billoux, Tillon and Croizat. As for Marrane, who was a senator and thus was not 'guilty' of having voted against the Prime Minister, he resigned of his own accord. Ramadier's assertion that the break was a simple event of French domestic politics was, in Tiersky's words, 'a masterpiece of understatement or diplomatic dissimulation'.[23] In fact, it heralded the beginning of the cold war in France so that the country could align

itself with the USA and the west. One should note that Communist ministers were dismissed in other European countries,[24] and in all cases the move had been dictated by the desire to comply with American wishes.[25]

Although the PCF leadership began by hopefully assuming that the breach was a temporary one, subsequent events were to show that it was destined to last for a very long time and that the party was condemned to go through a decade or more of almost complete isolation. To all intents and purposes, it was at war with the government on all issues. It was non-Communists who had been 'the first to begin open hostilities',[26] but for their part the Communists tried to give as good as they got. They attacked the successive governments of the Fourth Republic with as much vigour as they were being attacked by them. To the charge that they were a 'foreign party', they replied by dubbing all other political parties *le parti américain*; for the slogan *L'Amérique paiera*, which expressed the widespread belief that France's economic recovery depended on US aid, they substituted their old slogan, *Faire payer les riches*, and they warned against 'the enslavement of France by a foreign power'; against the government's foreign, home and colonial policies, they staged demonstrations, strikes and protest actions; finally, in answer to 'the ideological offensive' against them, they uncompromisingly defended their own doctrine. Before examining the salient aspects of their many-sided struggles, we must cast a brief glance at France's economic and political situation.

Economically, the most striking features were the rapid growth of industrial concentration and increased state intervention, both of which, according to Marxists, made French capitalism turn into 'state monopoly capitalism'. The first phenomenon involved the restriction of wealth and power to a small number of giant firms. These firms benefited from American aid and from the French state's attempt to regulate the economy. In 1946 Jean Monnet drew up a 'national plan' whose aim was not to control private enterprise, but to secure the employers' co-operation with the government by promising them higher profits as a result of rationalisation. The trend continued under the Fifth Republic, and to this day, national economic plans are part of the nation's economic life. John Ardagh reports that a member of the employers' federation told him that their association with the state was 'a voluntary one',[27] and he gives two reasons to account for the fact that private industry 'should have co-operated so readily with the

Plan'. One is 'the common background of the planners and the technocrats in some key firms'.[28] The other is that state industries gave the lead. If the Plans enabled France to become, in a very short time, a leading industrial power, the other side of the coin was the widening gap between profits and wages which is revealed by the following figures:[29]

	Wages %	*Farmers* %	*Savings* %	*Profits* %
1938	45	12	16	27
1947	41	15	4	40
1948	39	12	3	46

Such figures account for what Tiersky calls 'the legitimacy of the economic and social demands'[30] put forward by the unions and supported by the PCF. The most important social transformation was the dramatic decline of agriculture, as a large number of peasants were leaving the countryside to go and work in the new industries. Equally significant was the growth of a service industry and the emergence of a new urban middle class. Urbanisation changed the face of France and the outlook of her people. More and more Frenchmen were paid a wage or a salary and were entitled to social security benefits, more and more French women swelled the ranks of industrial, commercial and other workers, more and more French people of both sexes became unionised.

The effect of all this on the PCF's policies was bound to be very great. On the one hand, urbanisation meant that a majority in the country now had the same basic interests, so that a revolutionary party could put forward immediate radical programmes without cutting the nation into two opposing halves; on the other hand, the influx of new members into the working class and the growth of new middle strata had perforce to give a new look to the issues of working-class unity and popular unity. The PCF appreciated these points, but not sufficiently. For example, when reacting to the claim that France was living in a 'welfare state' and 'a consumer society', it did not go beyond saying that 'popular capitalism' was a myth and that all gains had been won by struggle. Even if this was true, it was too general to be quite satisfactory. Thorez's 1955 articles to prove that Marx's law of 'absolute and relative impoverishment' of the working class still applied to modern France were a spirited reply to those who asserted that all sections of society were better off in the post-war era, and Fauvet

admits that 'there was some truth in [his] demonstration, backed by figures . . . '.[31] But Fauvet adds that he had been 'too systematic in his analysis' and had not taken into account 'the diversity of situations'.[31] Generally speaking, the PCF's understanding that many social sections had common interests was not matched by its understanding of the specific needs of each section. As a result, it tended to concentrate on traditional forms of industrial struggle. In addition, it under-estimated the importance of the new social issues which had arisen, e.g. women's role in society. But then, most other political forces were equally short-sighted.

Politically, the Fourth Republic was a period of instability. From May 1947 to January 1956 there were no fewer than fourteen governments. Until June 1951 these were based on SFIO–MRP coalitions, together with a token number of Radicals and members of the newly-formed UDSR. (The latter, whose full name was *Union Démocratique et Socialiste de la Résistance*, was a socialist group which included François Mitterrand; it was even more anti-PCF than the SFIO.) However, the SFIO–MRP partnership did not prove strong enough to withstand the contentious issue of state aid to Catholic schools, strongly opposed by the traditionally secular Socialist party and no less strongly favoured by the Christian MRP. A minor break occurred in February 1950, when the Socialist ministers withdrew from the government of Georges Bidault (MRP), but differences between the two 'allies' were temporarily patched up in July, and the SFIO rejoined the government, which was headed by Pleven (UDSR) until March 1951, and by Queuille (Radical) until the June 1951 General Election. Between June 1951 and January 1956 the SFIO did not join any government, but one cannot say that it was really part of the Opposition, like the PCF on the left or the Gaullists on the right, because its deputies frequently voted with the government. There was a noticeable shift to the right in March 1952, when the Independent Antoine Pinay became Prime Minister, and again in June 1953, when another Independent, Joseph Laniel, formed a cabinet which lasted a whole year. Laniel was succeeded by a dynamic Radical leader, Pierre Mendès-France (June 1954–February 1955), and then by a more moderate Radical, Edgar Faure, who was PM until the January 1956 General Election. As for deGaulle, although he had ostensibly retired from politics, he founded the *Rassemblement du Peuple Français* (RPF) in 1947, and he was for ever pouring scorn on the patently obvious weaknesses of the Fourth

Republic. Of these weaknesses the PCF was no less critical, but instead of demanding a 'strong executive' like the general, it claimed that a really 'strong' government was one which 'relied on the people' and was not controlled by so-called 'experts'.

During the cold war, foreign policy became the central battle-ground between the PCF and all other political parties. There were two reasons for this. The first one is that by 1947 the international Communist movement had adopted the view, first expressed by Zhdanov at the inaugural meeting of the Cominform,[32] that the world was now split into two hostile camps, the camp of 'imperialism and war', headed by the USA, and the camp of 'socialism and peace', headed by the USSR. The struggle for peace and the defence of the Soviet Union thus became the paramount duty of all Communist parties, because they were seen as the precondition for any kind of social and political advance in the west. As far as the PCF was concerned, one can say that it was never more violently pro-Soviet than in the 1947–54 period, but it is necessary to add that at the same time its opponents – from the right-wing to the SFIO – were never more violently pro-American. French Communists genuinely believed that weakening the USA and solidarity with 'the socialist camp' were so crucial that without them, the prospect of a socialist France in the future was unthinkable. On the other hand, non-Communist parties genuinely thought that France's recovery could never take place without American assistance. The SFIO, in particular, felt that American credits alone were able to put the country back on its feet, and that without them it was impossible to envisage a future socialist France in which liberty (associated with 'Washington') would prevail instead of 'totalitarianism' (associated with 'Moscow'). For different reasons, centre and right-wing parties also relied heavily on the USA.

This brings us to the second factor which accounts for the importance of foreign policy issues, namely, that they were linked to the preservation and modernisation of France's socio-economic system. According to the PCF historian and economist, Henri Claude, the French bourgeoisie, which, in the pre-war period, had exported its capital to Europe, the Near East, Latin America and China, had to reckon with the fact that, after 1945, both eastern Europe and the Far East had ceased to come under French influence. It then sought new ways of getting rich. One was the modernisation of France itself and the setting up of large firms capable of competing with foreign rivals,

the other was to exploit the so far untapped wealth of the colonies. Both these aims required state intervention and outside aid, and neither could be achieved without ousting the PCF, which was the major obstacle to their implementation.[33] One does not have to be a Marxist in order to concede that, whatever the motives of French rulers, industrialisation, the use of the colonies, and state intervention did indeed proceed on an unprecedented scale, and that American aid helped in the process. Moreover, Henri Claude's analysis explains why, in the PCF's view, foreign and home policies had become indissolubly linked. The foreign policy issues on which the Communists fought especially hard were the Marshall Plan, NATO, the USSR, peace and Germany. On the first three they were practically isolated, but not so on the last two.

The Marshall Plan, officially known as the European Recovery Programme or ERP, was America's offer, made by George Marshall on 5 June 1947, to provide economic assistance to European countries, 'a number, if not all', on the condition that they could agree among themselves on 'a programme designed to place Europe on its feet economically'. Britain and France reacted by inviting the Soviet Union to joint talks, and they suggested the setting up of 'international expert committees' to draw up, on the basis of information 'voluntarily supplied' by each country, a list of requirements and plans. The three powers' foreign ministers met in Paris on 26 June, but they failed to reach agreement. Molotov complained that the Anglo–French proposal was 'a violation of national sovereignty', and he insisted that it was up to each country to produce its own estimates of the assistance it needed. Subsequently, the Soviet Union denounced the Marshall Plan as 'an imperialist trap' and said that its aim was to enable the USA to control Europe economically and politically. That became the PCF's assessment, but before that, the party had been cautious. Although it never shared Blum's wild enthusiasm for the Marshall Plan (which he described as 'the finest example of disinterested aid ever given by a big power'), its first reaction was one of mild welcome, on the assumption that it amounted to financial aid without political strings. It is worth adding that its attitude throughout was that France *did* need foreign assistance, but that her independence was not the price she ought to pay for it. When the 11th party congress opened on 25 June (i.e. on the eve of the ill-fated Paris conference), Thorez denied that he looked upon the ERP as a 'trap', although this is what had been asserted in *L'Huma-*

nité, and he further denied the paper's report that he had used the expression himself. Although the contrast between *L'Humanité* and the General Secretary was explained away (unconvincingly) as an error made by the party press service, it was obviously a reflection of the party's initial confusion. After the breakdown of the Paris conference, no such confusion was possible. The PCF dutifully echoed the Soviet Union, as did other Communist parties, including those which, like the PCI and the Czech CP, had expressed the hope that the 'Big Three' would come to an agreement. French Communists then started a vociferous campaign against the Plan and called for the setting up of 'defence committees' to save French industries from American interference. In particular, the party charged the USA with great power arrogance because it never consulted its allies. In this respect it was not entirely alone, for even *Le Monde* complained that the Americans had 'replaced a genuinely collective diplomacy . . . by a diplomacy which is unilaterally defined by the strongest ally . . .' (6 February 1953).

The Marshall Plan was followed by a western military alliance, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), which came into being in 1949. The PCF's most important action against NATO was the 28 May 1952 demonstration which it organised in conjunction with the Peace Movement and the CGT. Its aim was to protest against General Ridgway's coming to Paris to take up his post as supreme NATO commander. As Ridgway had just returned from Korea, where he was accused of having used napalm and germ warfare, the Communists and their supporters nicknamed him *Ridgway La Peste*. Despite the fact that the demonstration had been banned by the government, it took place all the same and lasted several hours. Over seven hundred people were arrested, about fifty were wounded, and one Algerian was killed. Two hours after it had ended, at about 10 p.m., Jacques Duclos (who had not been present) was arrested on his way home. His arrest was, in Fauvet's words, 'completely illegal and quite stupid',[34] for he was entitled to parliamentary immunity, liftable only if an indictable offence had been committed. He could not even be charged with unlawful possession of fire-arms, because the revolver found in his car, and carried as a precaution against attacks from which he had suffered in the past, did not belong to him but to his chauffeur. In desperation, the authorities fell back on two pigeons which were also found in the car and had been given to Duclos by a friend. They were described as carrier pigeons and as evidence that an underground plot

against France was being hatched by the 'Reds'. However, after the pigeons were examined by five experts and pronounced to be of the edible variety (in fact too young to fly!), the authorities were somewhat crestfallen. The pigeons' plot, as the affair came to be known, did little to enhance the prestige of its authors. On the other hand, the hurriedly called, badly prepared demonstration officially organised by the unions to demand Duclos's release was a failure (4 June 1952). On the 18th the PCF CC took part of the blame for this failure and warned against 'sectarianism'. During the five weeks that Duclos was in jail extensive searches were made, but nothing was found to substantiate a case, and on 1 July the Communist leader had to be freed.

If all French governments sided with the USA during the war, the PCF, for its part, firmly sided with the USSR to which it pledged 'unconditional support'. It was an unfortunate phrase, and later, Thorez qualified it by saying that the support was in fact *conditioned* by the USSR's socialist nature. In September 1948, the Politbureau pledged that 'the people of France will not, will never make war on the Soviet Union', and in February 1949, Thorez replied to the question which was insistently put to the PCF, 'What would you do if the Red Army occupied Paris?' After ruling out the possibility that the USSR could ever be an aggressor, he asked in his turn: if France were dragged into an anti-Soviet war and if the Soviet army 'was compelled to pursue the aggressor' on French soil, ' . . . could the workers and people of France behave towards the Soviet Army otherwise than did the workers and people of Poland, of Rumania, of Yugoslavia, etc?' It was not only to avoid legal prosecution that Thorez had resorted to ifs and ans but to show that he could not accept the terms of the question. Other parties said they were outraged, but although Thorez was summoned to appear before a parliamentary commission, it proved impossible to prosecute him.

The issue of peace enabled the PCF to break through its isolation. Initially, there were two peace movements, one led by Yves Farge and one led by the Communists, but at the end of 1948 the two merged and took the name of *Mouvement de la Paix*. Peace committees were set up throughout France. In April 1949 a world Peace Congress, presided by Joliot-Curie, was held in Paris, and on the wall of the meeting hall hung a huge dove painted by Picasso. There were peace marches all over France. In 1950 the Stockholm Appeal calling for the banning of nuclear weapons gathered five hundred million signatures, fourteen million in France, according to Communist sources.

According to the same sources the 1951 Berlin Appeal demanding a peace pact among the great powers gathered twelve million signatures in France. In addition, the PCF, the CGT and the Peace Movement organised countless protest actions, including the transport workers' refusal to transport arms for use against Vietnam or for future use against the Soviet Union. The Peace Movement 'served as one of the few points of connection between Communists and non-Communists in France during the Cold War'.[35] For the PCF, the fight for peace had the added advantage of providing a practical perspective to its own members and supporters. How far the leadership believed with the rest of the international Communist movement that 'the mass peace movement can lead to power' it is difficult to say, but it seems to have based its whole strategy on this assumption.

The other 'point of connection' between the PCF and other forces was Germany. Communists were unable to prevent west European economic integration, especially the joint control of coal and steel production, but in their fight against military integration and German rearmament, they found allies among Radicals such as Herriot and Daladier and among right-wingers such as de Gaulle and Weygand. In 1953 the PCF declared itself ready to co-operate 'with all Frenchmen whoever they are – we stress, whoever they are' to combat the plans then afoot for a European Defence Council (EDC). Some party members felt that their leaders were going too far, especially in envisaging an 'alliance with those who in 1939 banned the party', but they were told by Thorez that 'the party does not fear temporary agreements with unstable allies'. In August 1954 the National Assembly rejected EDC by 319 votes to 264, a result largely due to the combined opposition of Gaullists and Communists. It was the first major occasion since 1947 on which the PCF was not isolated in Parliament.

On the home front, the party fought industrially and electorally. In 1947 it exploited a series of strikes which it had not initiated, one in May and one in November–December which 'turned into a general strike in entire departments, notably in the south-west'.[36] The government used the police and the army against the strikers, killing one worker in Marseilles and another three in Valence. Shortly after the strike, a break-away union from the CGT was formed with SFIO backing and took the name of *Force Ouvrière* (FO). Once again, French unions were split, but 'this time the Socialists were in the minority'.[37] The FO leadership 'remained adamently hostile to over-

tures from the CGT',[38] which leads Tiersky to remark that the pattern in the political and in the industrial fields 'was strikingly similar: a series of proposals from the Communists rejected out of hand by the Socialists'.[38] In 1948, the miners went on strike and were supported by the CGT and the PCF. Jules Moch, the SFIO Home Minister, who had already used troops and police against the 1947 strikers, this time equipped them with war material, tanks, gas and machine guns. Four miners were killed and hundreds were wounded, which led to strong protests from the PCF in Parliament. Jules Moch was called a 'murderer' by Thorez, a 'scoundrel' by Duclos, a 'bastard' (*salaud*) by Florimond Bonte, and a 'professional liar' by Lecoeur. Nearly half the miners' delegates were arrested and jailed, and in some areas, miners were forced to go down the pits at machine-gun point. Whilst the strike was in progress, the government tried to discredit the PCF by accusing it of having received foreign money to stir up trouble, and Duclos counter-attacked by charging *Le Populaire* and FO with being largely financed by the USA.

By far the most important strikes occurred in August 1953. They were sparked off by Laniel's 'poverty decrees', which had made 25,000 public servants redundant. The FO federation of postal workers called for 'an unlimited general strike', and a joint CGT–CFTC appeal brought out the municipal workers. Three days later, three million workers were on strike, demanding the repeal of the decrees and a general wage rise. A substantial proportion were not industrial workers but salaried employees. The PCF declared its full support, partly out of traditional working-class solidarity and partly because it hoped that a mass movement of such magnitude would bring the Laniel government down. In this, it was disappointed because towards the end of the strike, the CFTC and FO accepted the government's concession, thus saving Laniel *in extremis* according to the Communists. The strike, however, had political repercussions, as both the Socialist, Mollet, and the Radical, Mendès-France, attacked the government, whilst continuing to reject united action with the PCF. It is worth noting that throughout the whole 1947–55 period numerous strikes took place. Not all were PCF- or CGT-inspired, but in every case the party was eager to be involved. Its industrial activity and victories made up for its political impotence.

This political impotence was largely caused by the SFIO's 1947 decision to launch the so called 'Third Force', i.e. a Socialist–MRP alliance against right-wing extremism (de Gaulle) and left-wing

extremism (PCF). Later, communism was declared 'the primary danger' (*le danger prioritaire*). The PCF assessment of the 'Third Force' was that it suited the Americans and the French bourgeoisie to use social-democracy against communism, but the SFIO justified its stand by saying that the PCF's endorsement of Soviet 'expansionist policies' made it an unreliable partner. Rather than accept a rational debate on the issue (which admittedly was rather difficult in a cold-war climate), if only to win over ordinary Socialist supporters, the PCF preferred to present the SFIO's new course as unadulterated betrayal of the working class. The Third Force was only partly successful. It kept the Communists out of government, but it did not destroy their industrial and even electoral influence. Moreover, it did not pay off electorally despite the 1951 *loi d'apparentement* which allowed the parties which were 'related' (*apparentés*) to get all the seats in constituencies were they managed to poll 51 per cent of the votes. The law was aimed at the Communists (who were neither allowed nor willing to declare any 'family relationship' with 'reactionary parties') and to a lesser extent at the Gaullists (who could and did conclude alliances with centre parties). The election results gave the PCF about five million votes (25.6 per cent), the SFIO 2,700,000 votes (a loss of 700,000) (14.5 per cent), the MRP 2,350,000 votes (a loss of three million) (12 per cent), the Gaullist RPF over four million votes (22.5 per cent), the Radicals about two million votes (10.5 per cent) and the independent conservatives over two million votes (12 per cent). The unfairness of the electoral law was reflected in the assembly's composition: the PCF, which had polled more votes than the RPF, had 103 deputies, whilst the RPF had 121. The SFIO had 107, the MRP 95, the Radicals 90, and the conservatives 96. Tiersky comments that the 'manipulation of the rules of the game' may have been necessary 'to save the Fourth Republic', but that it 'falsified the principle of representation of the electorate'.[39] Philip Williams also believes that the government parties' intention to reduce Communist and Gaullist representation was achieved 'at a high price in apparent unfairness'.[40] For the PCF, the results were neither a cause for joy nor for sadness because the few Communist losses in Paris and north of the Loire were made up by gains in the south. The party's electoral support came mostly from militant workers and from protesters of all kinds.

In the field of colonial policy, the PCF started by being alone against everybody else in its support of the Vietnamese and the

Algerian nationalists, but gradually, French public opinion switched from a pro-war to a pro-peace attitude. The war against Vietnam began while PCF ministers were still in the government, after the failure of the 1947 conference which had been convened to work out plans for the former colony's independence. That failure was followed by the bombing of Haiphong and Hanoi, which prompted Ho Chi Minh to call for armed resistance. The PCF fully supported him, and after its ministers were ousted from the government, it expressed this support in its propaganda, in its protest actions and in its parliamentary activity. The propaganda denounced 'the unjust character of the war' and claimed it was being waged to bring super-profits to the trusts and to fit in with the 'world imperialist strategy' of containing communism. The protest actions, organised together with the CGT, the Peace Movement, and women's and youth organisations, included the dockers' and railwaymen's frequent refusal to handle war material intended for the French army in Vietnam, and a number of individual gestures. Of the latter one must mention Raymonde Dien's attempt in February 1950 to stop a train carrying war material by lying on the railway lines, and Henri Martin's anti-war propaganda among sailors. Both were jailed, the former for one year and the latter for five years, and the party launched big campaigns for their release. Martin was freed in 1953. In Parliament, after the French had been defeated at Dien Bien Phu and the government had fallen as a result, the PCF stated that it would support any government which would order a cease-fire and conclude peace. On 17 June, it voted for Mendès-France because he had promised immediate peace in Indo-China, although Mendès-France himself declared that he would rather not be elected if he was going to owe his position to Communist votes. In the end, the new PM got a comfortable majority without having to include Communist support, and in July 1954 he signed the Geneva agreements which provided for the withdrawal of French troops and the division of Vietnam into north and south, pending free elections under international control. The agreements were ratified by the National Assembly and also by public opinion, as most French people had come to regard Vietnamese independence as inevitable and the war as unnecessarily costly.

No sooner had the Vietnam war stopped than the Algerian war started. It was to last over seven years, from November 1954 to February 1962, and we shall have to return to it in the next chapter. The armed revolt of the Algerian *Front de Libération Nationale*

(FLN) began on the 1st November, and two days later, Léon Feix, a Politbureau member, wrote in *L'Humanité* that France should accede to 'the legitimate demands for liberty' of the Algerian people. Whereas all other parties stuck to the idea that Algeria was a French province and that *L'Algérie, c'est la France*, the PCF insisted that Algeria was a separate nation, with its own customs and culture, and that *L'Algérie, c'est l'Algérie*. As in the case of Vietnam, the party's support was expressed through its propaganda, mass actions and parliamentary activity. But Algeria presented two special problems, first, the presence of one million French settlers, nicknamed *les pieds noirs*, and secondly, the fact that the FLN did not only conduct military operations against the French army but also resorted to acts of individual terrorism against French soldiers and French civilians. The *pieds noirs* were a problem because they regarded themselves as French, whereas the PCF had said, as far back as 1939, that they, together with 'twenty races' (Arabs, Berbers, Jews, etc.), were part of 'the Algerian nation in the process of formation'. (This process, incidentally, was said to have been completed in the 1950s and the party spoke of 'the Algerian nation as already constituted', of *le fait national algérien*.) Moreover, although the *pieds noirs* wanted Algeria to remain French, they were not all right-wingers, for about one fifth of them regularly voted Communist. To its credit, the PCF did not allow this electoral consideration to take precedence over its principles, and it stuck to its view that the Algerian *nation* was entitled to independence. It is true that the word 'independence' was often replaced by such phrases as 'the Algerian people's right to settle their own affairs', but that was partly done in order to 'sell' the idea of independence gradually to the French, and partly in order to avoid prosecution and the seizing and banning of Communist papers, both of which happened frequently during the period anyway. As for individual terrorism, the PCF reasserted the standard Communist view[41] that it was counter-productive as it alienated the French people, whose support was crucial, and that the correct alternative was *mass* armed struggle and *mass* political work. The party also stressed that the duty of French progressives was to work in France in order to win over public opinion in their own country and not to become mere adjuncts of the Algerian FLN; this led Communists to reject the slogan taken up by Jeanson, Sartre and others, that one had 'to carry suitcases for the FLN'. (These people became known as *les porteurs de valises*.)

The party's propaganda on Algeria was centred around two themes. The first one was that the French colonialists cleverly exploited the French people's feelings of 'kith and kin' links with Algeria but that their chief interest was Algerian oil and the economic and military control of Algeria. The second one was the denunciation of 'the dirty war' waged on the Algerians, which included attacks on civilians by paratroopers and the torture of prisoners by French army officers and NCOs; the latter was strongly condemned in *La Question*, a book written by Henri Alleg on the basis of first-hand knowledge (he himself had been tortured as a French Communist helping the Algerians) and which quickly became a bestseller. When it came to action, the PCF rejected what it described as 'anarchist calls' for desertion and insubordination, and advocated instead anti-war propaganda in the army itself as well as among the civilians. To desert the army, it claimed, was to leave the mass of soldiers under the sole influence of 'reactionary' propaganda. A large number of PCF members were arrested and jailed for their work in the army. Others were also harassed and arrested for their part in street demonstrations, the stoppage of trains carrying troops or war equipment, strikes and mass meetings. Those meetings were frequently banned. Eventually, the French people got sick and tired of a war they could not win, and this was reflected in the stand taken by political parties such as the SFIO and the Radicals, both of which advocated negotiations rather than war. The PCF took this as a vindication of its own stand.

The PCF's internal life during the cold-war decade was characterised by a membership decline and by leadership problems. In 1945–6, the aim of one million members had been confidently forecast, and the secretariat even claimed to have issued that many cards, but they were not all taken up.[42] By 1956 the membership figure descended to about 400,000, which represented a 50 per cent loss or more. What was especially disturbing was that the loss had occurred in working-class areas. Among the many reasons for this downward trend, one must mention the government's repression and anti-Communist propaganda, the political and industrial split of the left, the party's own sectarianism (frequently denounced but always reappearing), and also the political apathy of the period which hit all parties and not only the PCF. (The SFIO lost about two-thirds of its members.) The first leadership problem occurred in October 1950, when Maurice Thorez had a sudden stroke which provoked paralysis of his right limbs. A month later he went to the Soviet Union for treatment

and remained there until April 1953. As we have seen, another leader was also absent for a while, though not for so long, and that was Duclos, who went to jail in 1952. Partly because of this – but only partly – the party swung from right-wing 'opportunism' to left-wing 'sectarianism' and vice-versa, with the result that its influence among the working class suffered considerably. For a Communist party nothing worse could happen. It is against this background that the purges of Marty, Tillon and Lecoeur took place.

The Marty–Tillon 'affair' shook the party in 1952. At first, the two men were removed from the Politbureau, then from the Central Committee, and in 1953 Marty was expelled from the party. To the political case against him were added the charge of 'factionalism' and the ritual charge of being a police spy. The first of these was difficult to substantiate, for it was hard to prove conclusively that Marty's talks with other critics of the leadership really amounted to the formation of an organised group within the party, which is what 'factionalism' means. As for the second charge, it was quite ludicrous and rested on nothing more than the fact that Marty's brother, a freemason, was friendly with the Prefect of Police, also a freemason! One must however remember that police infiltration did take place during the period, or at any rate was attempted, and this may help to explain the party's nervousness, without in the least condoning it. The approach to Tillon was different, largely because he himself decided not to make a fuss and to retire gracefully to his home village and devote himself to literary work. (He was eventually expelled in 1970.)[43] The political case against Marty and Tillon is practically unintelligible to a non-Communist and even to a modern Communist as so much jargon was used. The whole 'affair' remains unclear to this day, but one can safely assume that in addition to personality clashes (Marty in particular was very arrogant and ambitious),[44] the two leaders, who undoubtedly had *gauchiste* tendencies, were chosen as scapegoats in the fight against sectarianism.

In 1954 another top leader, Lecoeur, was attacked and purged. As Organisation Secretary, he was accused of having shown himself authoritarian, especially in dealing with intellectuals,[45] and of having tried to gain control of the party by appointing a number of 'political instructors', one for every cell, who were directly accountable to himself. The second charge was factually true, but it must be said that the Politbureau had given its blessing. In June 1954 Lecoeur was replaced by Marcel Servin and suspended for a year. After the publi-

cation of a book which he defiantly entitled *L'Auto-critique attendue* and which included virulent attacks on Thorez, on Jeannette Vermeersch (Thorez's wife) and Duclos, he was finally expelled in November 1955. There is little doubt that Marty, Tillon and Lecoeur were cold-war casualties. The PCF felt that it was at war and that it could not tolerate any disaffection within its ranks. This, however, is an explanation, not a justification. It is unlikely that any modern French Communist would wish to defend the party's action, even if he feels that the political criticisms of the dissidents were valid, and it is significant that in subsequent years[46] the removal of top leaders was achieved in a more balanced way.

The PCF held three congresses during the cold war. The 11th congress, held in June 1947, was dominated by the mistaken belief that the party would soon return to the government, and in fact ended with shouts of '*Thorez au pouvoir*'. The twelfth congress, held in April 1950, focused on the struggle for peace. The keynote was that 'peace hangs by a thread', but also that war is not inevitable and can be averted by mass action. The 13th congress, held in June 1954, took place as the cold war was very slowly beginning to be replaced by 'peaceful co-existence' and against the background of the PCF's limited successes in a number of fields. A noteworthy aspect of this last congress was its attention to cultural matters and its proclaimed rejection of 'dogmatism'.[47] The physicist Joliot-Curie (absent for health reasons) sent a message which ended with the words, 'I am proud to belong to such a party', and the poet, Aragon, advocated 'a great national art', which was not meant to be the illustration of day-to-day slogans, but required 'a long-term perspective, which is that of the nation, and in which the working class increasingly identifies itself with the nation'.

An assessment of the PCF's 1947–55 period must avoid oversimplification, because the phrase 'cold-war ghetto', although basically accurate, needs to be qualified. The party's stand on peace, Germany, Vietnam and Algeria, gained Communists a certain amount of understanding and sympathy. More importantly from a Marxist point of view, despite serious shortcomings in its work and at times its inability to gauge the real mood of the popular masses, the PCF kept working-class militancy at a high, challenging level, which leads the Communist historian Roger Martelli to assert that 'in this difficult period also, the PCF played a positive role in the development of the working class and of French society'.[48] Finally, towards the end of the

period, a 'New Left' had come into being, whose aims and philosophy were very different from those of the PCF (some of its members could even be described as anti-Communists), but which at least attempted, in its own way, to reject the policies of the past. The emergence of the 'New Left' must be seen in conjunction with Mendès-France's 'New Deal' experiment (selective state intervention to assist the modernisation of French industry), an experiment which led to the belief that there could be such a thing as 'progressive capitalism' happily evolving into socialism. The PCF, of course, had no time for the concept of 'progressive capitalism', which it denounced as a myth, but it was careful not to close the door on a possible rapprochement with the 'New Left'. Writing in the May 1955 issue of the *Cahiers du Communisme*, François Billoux asserted that this novel trend included people who were 'honestly seeking agreement with the Communist Party', and he pledged that, for its part, the PCF would 'help every step forward which will lead to a change of policy'.

Recovery begins (1956–7)

The year 1956 started on a hopeful note for the PCF, because in January the General Election returned a left-wing majority, in terms of both votes and seats. Admittedly, there had also been a disturbingly high number of votes given to a new right-wing 'populist' movement, led by Poujade, which claimed to represent the interests of 'the small man', but on the whole, Communists looked upon the results (which are shown below) as quite encouraging:

	Votes	*Percentage of votes cast*	*Seats*
PCF	5,454,589	25.4%	146 (+51)
SFIO	3,180,656	14.8%	89 (− 6)
Radicals	2,876,398	13.4%	70 (− 7)
MRP	2,374,221	11%	71 (−13)
Gaullists	948,854	4.4%	17 (−89)
Poujadists	2,451,555	11.4%	51
Independents	3,451,664	16.2%	100 (+13)

Thus, the three left parties had an absolute majority of votes (53.6 per cent) and of seats (305 against 239 for their opponents). This led both Communists and the non-Communist left to argue that their respective stands had been vindicated. The PCF said that there was in fact a 'Popular Front majority', which was arithmetically true, even

though the Radicals were split into supporters of Mendès-France and followers of Edgar Faure; but the non-Communists replied that the country had rejected left-wing 'extremism' (the PCF) as well as right-wing 'extremism' (Poujade), so that the situation called for the formation of a moderate 'Republican Front', made up of the SFIO, the Radicals, and those Gaullists who called themselves the *Républicains Sociaux*. Whether that was indeed what the country wanted, the fact remains that, in the words of P. M. Williams, 'the Republican Front was never within sight of an independent majority'.[49] All the same, the SFIO decided to go ahead with it, and Guy Mollet formed a Republican Front government. The PCF, which had waged the electoral campaign under the slogan, 'For a new Popular Front', decided to vote for Mollet in Parliament. A more controversial vote occurred on 12 March 1956 when Mollet asked for 'special powers' to deal with Algeria and again was supported by the PCF. The party explained its stand by saying, first, that it continued to oppose the use of force, and secondly, that it was crucial to prevent a collusion between the SFIO and the right. The trouble was that this collusion had already started: after his visit to Algiers on 6 February, Mollet yielded to right-wing pressure and decided to pursue the war with greater vigour. To this effect, he began by dismissing the Resident-General he had himself appointed, General Catroux, and to replace him with Robert Lacoste, a tougher man, although he was a Socialist. In any case, the PCF's hope that the 'special powers' would be used against the right proved unfounded, and one may argue that the party had been incredibly naive in thinking that they could have been used otherwise than against the FLN. On the other hand, it was true that the SFIO was deeply divided on the Algerian issue and that many rank-and-filers sincerely favoured a peaceful solution. That the PCF leadership was not too happy about its March vote was shown in June, when the party parliamentary group decided to abstain when Mollet asked for a vote of confidence. At the meeting which preceded the vote, a substantial number of Communist deputies had advocated opposing the government, but in the end, the decision to abstain was taken almost unanimously.

Not only had the PCF failed at home, but external developments in 1956 brought new difficulties for the party. The first of these was the denunciation of Stalin at the 20th congress of the CPSU, held in February.[50] In addition to an internal crisis, the PCF had to face attacks, many of which somewhat justified whatever their motives, for having

blindly followed Moscow in the past. Worse was to come when, in November, Soviet tanks occupied Budapest and thus put an end to the revolt against the regime.[51] Finally, almost at the same time, came 'the Suez adventure', i.e. the attack on Egypt which Britain, France and Israel jointly launched at the end of October as a punitive measure against Nasser, who had just nationalised the Suez canal. The attack was a fiasco because the three governments were criticised by the UN, the USA and the USSR, and had to withdraw their troops, but the PCF was unable to get real support for its anti-government stand because, on the whole, 'the nation . . . was losing interest in politics',[52] as Professor Cobban remarks. Indeed, apart from the Communists, it was only the armed forces which were highly critical, because they felt deeply humiliated. Hardly a basis for an alliance with a political party, least of all the PCF!

In 1957 further conflicts occurred, first over the EEC, which the PCF described as 'a capitalist alliance' and a threat to France's sovereignty,[53] and then over developments in Algeria, where the partisans of *Algérie française* were blaming the Paris rulers for their 'weakness' in waging the war. For its part, the PCF complained that the government was showing 'weakness' in dealing with 'the fascist threat' and that it was afraid of 'mobilising the people' against it. That successive French governments were indeed weak over Algeria – in both directions – is a fact, and it is one of the main reasons why de Gaulle was able to return to power in 1958. As we shall see, this event interrupted the PCF's gradual recovery. For in 1956, its membership had gone up, its 14th congress had guardedly started the de-Stalinisation process, and its electoral support, mostly from dynamic industrial areas and from young people, was quite encouraging. The Fifth Republic temporarily put an end to all that.

Notes

1 R. Tiersky, *op. cit.*, p. 123.
2 G. Cogniot, quoted by Fauvet in *op. cit.*, p. 375.
3 In later years, especially after 1956, the PCI displayed more independence than the PCF.
4 Cf. report of the colloquium held in 1976, published by the CNRS.
5 Robert Aron, *Histoire de la libération de la France*, Fayard, 1959, p. 376.
6 For the latter cf. especially Jean-Paul Scot in *Etapes et Problemes*, pp. 234–52.
7 R. Tiersky, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

8 Quoted by Fauvet, *op. cit.*, p. 369.
9 *Le Monde*, 29 November 1946.
10 *L'Humanité*, 30 November 1946.
11 F. Goguel, quoted by J. Ranger in 'L'évolution du vote communiste en France depuis 1945' (in *Le communisme en France*, Armand Colin, 1969), p. 214.
12 Fauvet, *op. cit.*, p. 359.
13 L. Blum, *A l'échelle humaine* (written in 1941–2, published by Gallimard in 1971), p. 71.
14 A. Philip, speaking at the August 1946 SFIO congress.
15 J.-P. Scot, *Histoire du Réformisme*, vol. 1 (Editions Sociales, 1976), p. 235.
16 It must be pointed out that there was also a neo-Guesdist trend inside the SFIO led by Guy Mollet. However, as Blum was a social-democrat of the 'classic' variety, his views are especially relevant here.
17 Cf. J. Elleinstein, 'La libération, espoirs et déceptions' (in *De la guerre à la libération*, Editions Sociales, 1972), pp. 107–12.
18 Quoted in *History of Socialism Yearbook* (Prague, 1968), p. 123.
19 For further details about this interview, cf. *Cahiers d'histoire de l'Institut Maurice Thorez*, no. 19 (1976) and nos. 25–6 (1978).
20 Cf. E. Fajon, 'Nationalisation is a socialist measure when it is achieved by a socialist state. In all other cases, it is not a socialist measure' (*Cahiers du communisme*, February 1945); and J. Duclos, 'Nationalisation . . . is simply a reform of a democratic character'. (*Ibid.*, April 1945).
21 R. Tiersky, *op. cit.*, p. 153.
22 The PCF ministers were mandated by the Politbureau to vote for the government in order to preserve cabinet solidarity.
23 R. Tiersky, *op. cit.*, p. 160.
24 On 19 March 1947 Communist ministers were dismissed from the Belgian government; on 13 May 1947, Communist and Socialist ministers were ousted from the Italian government.
25 Cf. Fauvet, *op. cit.*, pp. 387–8.
26 R. Tiersky, *op. cit.*, p. 160.
27 J. Ardagh, *The New France* (Pelican, 1977), p. 40.
28 *Ibid.*, p. 44.
29 Figures from *La IVe République* (Editions Sociales, 1972), p. 78.
30 R. Tiersky, *op. cit.*, p. 172.
31 Fauvet, *op. cit.*, p. 454.
32 Cf. Ch. 8, pp. 226–7.
33 Cf. Henri Claude, 'Grandes lignes de la stratégie et de la politique de l'impérialisme français (1947–1958)', in *La IVe République*, pp. 7–10.
34 Fauvet, *op. cit.*, p. 429.
35 R. Tiersky, *op. cit.*, p. 221.
36 E. Shorter and C. Tilly, *Strikes in France 1830–1968* (Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 138.
37 R. Tiersky, *op. cit.*, p. 171.
38 *Ibid.*, p. 194.
39 *Ibid.*, p. 185.

40 P. M. Williams, D. Goldey and M. Harrison, *French Politicians and Elections* (Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 12.
41 Cf., for example, the British Communists' condemnation of IRA terrorism.
42 Cf. Appendix 3.
43 Cf. Ch. 7, p. 201.
44 Cf. Ceretti's assessment of the two men, *op. cit.*, pp. 340–1. Marty died a broken man in 1956.
45 In 1953, shortly after Stalin's death, Lecoeur criticised Aragon, then editor of *Les Lettres Françaises*, for having published in his journal a Picasso portrait of Stalin, thought to be 'irreverent' because the Soviet leader was shown as a young man rather than as a father figure. Thorez, who was still in Moscow, claims that he was appalled by Lecoeur's action and that he issued a strong protest (cf. *Fils du Peuple*, 1960 edn., pp. 285–6).
46 Cf. Ch. 6, p. 172 and Ch. 7, p. 201.
47 In particular, the party gave up its previous view that 'proletarian science' was different from and opposed to 'bourgeois science'. Duclos said that science was universal.
48 R. Martelli, *Etapes et Problèmes*, p. 295.
49 P. M. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 63.
50 Cf. Ch. 8, pp. 228–33.
51 Cf. Ch. 8, pp. 233–5.
52 A. Cobban, *op. cit.*, p. 233.
53 After initially attacking the EEC and demanding France's withdrawal from it, the PCF subsequently modified its stand. In 1962 it acknowledged the EEC's existence as 'a fact', and began to talk of changing and 'democratising' its institutions from within. In 1963 it took part in a conference of the then six EEC Communist parties, which had been called to draw up a common policy against the EEC's 'reactionary aspects', whilst remaining part of it. In 1965 it put forward what it called a 'democratic alternative to the Europe of the monopolies', an objective to which it remains committed to this day (1984).

CHAPTER 6

Into battle: The PCF against the Gaullist Fifth Republic (1958–68)

The birth of the Fifth Republic was preceded by a military coup in Algiers on 13 May 1958. A group of officers and *colons*[1] formed a 'committee of public safety' and threatened to take power in Paris, by means of civil war if necessary. The government, headed by Pflimlin (MRP), was struck with terror and was only too relieved when de Gaulle offered himself as a 'saviour'. The PCF tried to 'mobilise the people' against him, especially through the 28 May demonstration, which was widely supported despite a last-minute SFIO refusal to take part, but de Gaulle was elected Prime Minister by Parliament by 329 votes to 224. He immediately formed a broad government, in which he included the SFIO, and announced that he would hold a referendum to find out if the people wanted a new constitution. The referendum was held in September and nearly 80 per cent of those who cast their votes backed the general by answering Yes. In November the legislative elections gave the pro-de-Gaulle parties (practically all parties, minus the PCF) 78.5 per cent, including 17.5 per cent to the new Gaullist party, the *Union pour la Nouvelle République* (UNR). In December, an electoral college appointed de Gaulle as President of the Republic by 62,000 votes against 10,000 for Marrane (PCF) and 6,700 for Chatelet (a Mendessist). In January, the new President made Michel Debré his first Prime Minister, but the SFIO left the government in protest against its austerity measures.

The advent of the Fifth Republic posed three problems to the PCF – first, the nature of the Gaullist regime, its immediate significance as well as its impact on the party's struggle for socialism; secondly, how to fight against it, especially, how to build a united left opposition to it and at the same time how to recover the ground lost by the PCF by initiating mass struggles and improving Communist electoral work, with the emphasis on the first;[2] and finally, how to change the party itself, in terms of its internal life, its short-term and long-term prog-



ramme, and its relations with the international Communist movement, in order to make it equal to the task. Until 1968 the PCF's battle against Gaullism went through three stages (in the course of which all the above problems had to be tackled), which will be briefly examined in turn: the 1958–62 stage of adjustment and re-adjustments to a novel situation; the 1962–5 stage of mustering the forces of the Opposition, industrially and politically; and the 1965–8 stage of open battle, culminating in the revolt of May 1968. It must be stressed that throughout these stages, the PCF's attitude was dictated partly by its own analyses and initiatives, and partly by events outside its control, such as the changes taking place in France (socio-economic and political), the stand taken by other political forces (both the party's long-standing enemies on the right and its potential allies on the left), and the international situation.

For a Marxist party the most important new developments were the socio-economic changes. The trend towards greater industrial and financial concentration and towards increased state intervention, which had begun under the Fourth Republic, became even more pronounced under the Fifth. The modernisation of French industry proceeded at a faster pace, and as the country's dependence on foreign aid diminished, its foreign policy tended to become more independent. (This is not to say that de Gaulle's own ideas about France's role in the world did not *also* play a part in this last respect, but even non-Marxists will concede that there was a coincidence between his semi-mystical vision and the more mundane interests of leading French bankers and industrialists.) State economic plans became increasingly drawn up by technocrats and experts, and Professor Cobban, who thinks that this was 'a necessary condition of economic and social progress', adds nevertheless that the means employed 'largely by-passed the normal processes of politics'.[3] He also writes that ' . . . the directors and managers of private enterprise and their opposite numbers in the Commissariat du Plan had the same intellectual background and outlook, spoke the same language, and largely envisaged the same ends'.[4] French Marxists were quick to interpret such facts as evidence that the state was now controlled by big business. Moreover, as had happened before 1958, modernisation and industrialisation did not benefit all social classes to the same extent. The modest wage rises did not keep up with inflation and with higher productivity, so that when the economic boom began to slow down, 'there were many sectors of French society which claimed that they

were badly treated'.[5] On the sociological side, the most significant change was that there was now an overwhelming majority of salaried workers (including blue and white collar workers), 71.7 per cent of the working population by comparison with 60 per cent in 1954, according to the 1963 census. The same census revealed that there had been a significant increase in the number of those employed by the processing and clothing industries, the public sector, the service industry, and the banking and insurance firms, and that the number of salaried women had gone up by 14.7 per cent as against 9.5 per cent for men. The PCF showed itself much more aware of all these changes than it had been in the 1950s, and at its 17th congress, held in 1964, it tried to relate the party's policy to the changes in French society.

From the political point of view, the chief novelty introduced by the Fifth Republic lay in the constitutional field. The Gaullist constitution, although it was actually drawn up by Michel Debré, embodied the views which de Gaulle himself had put forward as far back as 1946, namely, a strong executive and a reduced role for Parliament. In the aftermath of the Resistance and the Liberation, most political parties had objected to these features, and de Gaulle had had to resign; in 1958, the PCF was the only party which continued to object, whilst non-Communist opposition came mainly from individuals and minorities within left, centre and even right-wing parties. The opponents of the new regime, especially the PCF, were highly critical of the President's increased powers: according to Article 8 of the constitution, it is he who appoints the Prime Minister and who presides over cabinet meetings; Article 11 gives him the right to by-pass the National Assembly and appeal directly to the people by means of a referendum; and Article 16 allows him to ignore Parliament if he thinks that there is an emergency. As for Parliament, it meets twice a year only, for eighty days in the first place and for not more than ninety days in the second place. Proportional representation is abolished and is replaced with the single-member system with two ballots. The Communist complaint that the Fifth Republic constitution was tailor-made to suit the interests of the right seemed amply justified until 1981, but ironically, after Mitterrand's victory, the same constitution appeared to work in the left's favour!

Initially, all major French political parties welcomed de Gaulle, with the exception of the Communists, of course; however, right from the start, many of them had reservations or misgivings, and as time



went on, these led to new party alignments. On the right, the most dynamic force was the Gaullist party, the UNR; at first, it was unanimous in unreservedly supporting de Gaulle, but by 1961, although the main aims of his policy were not challenged, criticisms were voiced concerning the reduced role of Parliament. The other right-wing party, which included Third Republic and Fourth Republic statesmen, such as Reynaud and Pinay, differed from the Gaullists chiefly because they spoke on behalf of medium and small businessmen. They called themselves the *Centre National des Indépendants et Paysans* (CNIP). On the left, the main parties were the Radical party, the MRP, the SFIO and the PCF. The first of these had declined after the fall of the Third Republic, but it regained some influence under the Fifth; it was united in its attachment to traditional parliamentary forms, but on nearly all other issues, it was split into various tendencies. The MRP, after having earned for itself the reputation of being de Gaulle's most faithful supporter, soon found itself unhappy about the new government's social, economic and political measures; it started to lose votes in the 1962 General Election, and by the end of the 1960s, it had disappeared as a party, to be replaced by the *Centre des Démocrates Sociaux*, or CDS. On the left, the SFIO continued to be the PCF's chief rival, but its predominantly middle-class composition, its Fourth Republic record, its initial support for de Gaulle, and the disunity within its ranks were all handicaps which the Communists exploited to the full. We shall see in the rest of this chapter how the new political alignments affected the PCF.

But first a few words about the international situation. In some respects, the external developments of the 1958–68 period greatly helped the PCF, but some were a source of embarrassment and difficulties. On the positive side, the most important feature was that 'peaceful co-existence' had succeeded the cold war. Although quite a few crises occurred (of which the most serious was the 1962 Cuban crisis), the habit grew to settle disputes around the conference table. Khrushchev's diplomatic initiatives and popular style tended to improve the image of communism. De Gaulle's foreign policy, although based on what the PCF called 'big power politics', involved better relations with the USSR and some opposition to the USA (in 1966 France announced she would withdraw from NATO). On the negative side, the war in Vietnam (admittedly waged by the USA and not by France this time), the Sino-Soviet dispute and the occupation



of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact troops were probably the issues which gave the PCF its gravest headaches, the first one because it threatened to take the world back to the cold war division into two camps, the second one because it shattered the illusion that 'socialist countries' are bound to have friendly relations, and the last one because it represented a great power 'diktat' imposed on a small nation.

Adjustments and re-adjustments (1958–62)

The new features of the Gaullist regime were in themselves a sufficient justification for a detailed Communist analysis, but the party's set-back at the September 1958 referendum and at the November General Election made it even more imperative to arrive at a proper understanding of the novel era which had started and showed every sign of lasting. The fact that 80 per cent of the votes cast had gone to de Gaulle meant that the PCF had lost at least one-fifth of its traditional electors (if not one-third when one includes those who abstained). The loss of one and a half million votes in the General Election and the meagre percentage of 18.9 per cent further stressed the seriousness of the Communist setback. The party wasted no time in acknowledging this, and at the CC meeting held in October – before the legislative elections – Marcel Servin did not mince his words and said that nothing like that had happened since the liberation. He then accounted for de Gaulle's victory by saying that the 'state apparatus' (especially the army) and the media had been wholly on his side, that he himself had exploited both his wartime prestige and his self-proclaimed ability to avert civil war, and above all, that many people, frustrated because they had voted left without results, had turned to him in the hope that he would make a clean sweep of the past. Thorez followed Servin and stressed that there was no unity among the Yes voters, and he confidently forecast that contradictions among them would soon explode and that illusions would soon vanish. In the meantime, the new regime was a fact, and it was necessary to understand its class basis in order to assess its political aims in terms of institutions, colonial policy and foreign policy.

The PCF was the only party which, right from the start, drew a distinction between the transient aspect of Gaullism – a solution to the Algerian problem – and its more lasting feature – a major reorganisation of French social and political life. Its immediate verdict on the regime was that it represented the rule of big business, and the phrase



'personal rule on behalf of the monopolies' was consistently maintained to sum up in a nutshell the Communist assessment of Gaullism. What did vary and gave rise to hesitations and controversies was the party's views concerning the extent to which de Gaulle could be called a fascist and the importance of the internal contradictions among the social forces which backed him. On the first issue, the party wavered between equating Gaullism with fascism pure and simple and between the formulation that de Gaulle's 'dictatorship paves the way for fascism'. In the end neither assessment prevailed, and the PCF preferred to regard the presidential regime instituted by the Fifth Republic as one which best suited the centralised stage reached by French capitalism, but not as one which involved the forcible destruction of working-class and democratic opposition. For the party had come to believe that the French ruling class did not need – as yet – a fascist dictatorship, and consequently that, despite all its regressive aspects, Gaullism had not closed the door on the possibility of fighting for a 'restoration and renewal of democracy', which became the party's immediate goal. A December 1958 joint PCF–PCI Declaration specifically asserted that the new regime in France was 'totalitarian' but was different from 'fascism of the classic type'; however, the PCF 15th congress, held six months later in June 1959, ended with a resolution which described Gaullism as 'the rule of the monopolies' and as 'a presidential regime oriented towards personal dictatorship and opening the way to fascism'.[6]

What finally convinced the PCF that Gaullism, despite its authoritarian and 'anti-democratic' character, was not a new variant of fascism was a number of developments in 1960–1 which showed where the real fascist threat lay. The *ultras*, who had initially backed de Gaulle in the hope that he would keep Algeria French, felt they had been let down when in November 1960 the general announced his intention to offer the Algerians 'self-determination', and got 75 per cent of the voters to support him in the January 1961 referendum. (As people were asked to approve both self-determination and new Algerian institutions by decree from Paris, the PCF had advocated voting No.) In April 1961 four high-ranking generals attempted a putsch to oust de Gaulle, and in the same month the OAS (*Organisation de l'Armée Secrète*) revealed its existence by claiming responsibility for the terroristic attacks on democrats and liberals of all kinds. The 16th PCF congress (June 1961) gave up the equation Gaullism–fascism, but it blamed 'the government of the monopolies'

for having made possible 'the military fascist rebellion of 22 April' by its leniency towards 'factious elements'.

The most important event which gave rise to an internal controversy within the PCF on the issue of the French bourgeoisie's attitude towards de Gaulle was Pinay's resignation from the government in January 1960. Whereas Marcel Servin, supported by Laurent Casanova, saw this as proof that sections of big business had withdrawn their support for the regime, the rest of the leadership replied that Pinay represented the non-monopolist sections of the bourgeoisie and that his departure had made the Gaullist government more reactionary, not less. The majority on the CC also criticised Servin and a number of party economists for believing that Gaullism expressed the interests of the 'nationalist' wing of the bourgeoisie rather than those of the multinational firms. At the January 1961 CC meeting a resolution was adopted which declared that internal contradictions within the French ruling class as well as 'inter-imperialist contradictions' (especially those between France and the USA) certainly existed but were less important than the main contradiction between capital and labour inside each capitalist country and between imperialism as a whole and 'the forces of democracy and socialism'. All this was not a purely academic question. Believing that some of the monopolies were against de Gaulle, Servin had expressed some doubt about the party's wisdom in voting against the nuclear strike force, whilst Casanova (influenced, it was said, by the 'progressive Gaullist' Emmanuel d'Astier de la Vigerie) had suggested that a less intransigent attitude on the PCF's part might have helped de Gaulle to carry out a better social policy. Thorez thought this was a dangerous illusion, and he later told Ceretti, 'Can one imagine de Gaulle as a 'social man'? It sounds like a joke'.[7] As there were also disagreements over Casanova's role in the Peace Movement,[8] the leadership decided to remove the two men from the Central Committee. However – and this was a sign that times had changed – neither of them was vilified and expelled from the party. Servin later became acting District Secretary in the Moselle *Fédération*, and *L'Humanité* published a friendly obituary when he died in 1968. As for Casanova, he remained a rank-and-filer, but when he died in 1972 *La Nouvelle Critique* recalled his past services (particularly in the cultural field) and called him 'a great militant'.

Although the PCF had lost a great many of its traditional supporters as a result of de Gaulle's triumphant comeback, it did not think

that it had lost them for ever, and it said so as early as October 1958, when the CC met to discuss the referendum results. In subsequent weeks, it set itself the task of regaining its lost ground by stepping up its 'mass work' and by making use of all democratic channels, including elections and Parliament. The former was bound to take precedence over the latter, not only because it is standard Communist practice to put 'the mass movement' first, but also because the party's parliamentary representation had been reduced to ten seats in November 1958, which meant that it could not even constitute itself as an independent group in the Assembly. The first protest actions in which the PCF played a major role occurred in 1959 and were caused by the unpopular government decrees curtailing Social Security benefits. A petition organised by the CGT and the other unions gathered half a million signatures, and in the end the government gave in, withdrawing its Social Security legislation and even increasing family allowances by 10 per cent. The PCF drew the moral that 'mass struggles can compel the regime to retreat'. On wages, however, the government was adamant and set a 3 per cent limit on all wage rises. When the railwaymen struck in protest in June 1959, they were forced back to work by threats of instant dismissal and by the 'requisitioning' of the railways, i.e. by making railway work a form of compulsory national service. They resumed their battle by striking again in May 1960, and this time won a wage increase. Other workers followed suit, mainly the miners and those working in the steel, transport and textile industries. A significant number of white collar workers and technicians also came out. The PCF Politbureau called on all Communists to be the best fighters 'in the great struggles waged by the working class and the whole of our people'. It was also in 1960 that there were protests among the peasants and among teachers, the latter objecting to state grants for Catholic schools. In 1961 and in 1962, the PCF-inspired demonstrations against the OAS and the 'fascist threat' enabled the party to establish grass-roots links with Socialist and other workers.

In the electoral field, the PCF's recovery began with the 1959 municipal elections. The Communist percentage at the first ballot was an encouraging 29 per cent, and at the second ballot there were joint PCF–SFIO lists in about fifty towns, despite the SFIO leadership's refusal to conclude national electoral agreements with the Communists. In the January 1961 referendum de Gaulle got 400,000 fewer votes than in 1958, and the number of absentions rose to nearly seven



million, which the PCF welcomed as proof that opposition to the regime was growing. That was over-optimistic on its part, as it ignored the fact that abstentions generally stem from apathy. In 1962, there were three further electoral contests. The first was a referendum on the Evian Agreements which had just granted Algeria her full independence. Although the PCF refused to wax enthusiastic about de Gaulle's new stand, regarding it rather as the proof that 'the monopolies are ready to sacrifice some of the *colons*' interests in order to try and retain control of [Algeria's] wealth, especially the Sahara oil', it advocated voting Yes, and in this it was on the same side as all other parties except the extreme right and the extreme left.[9] (De Gaulle got 90 per cent of the votes cast.) The second contest was another referendum, held in October about de Gaulle's wish to get the President of the Republic elected by universal suffrage. The majority in the Assembly, including the PCF, were not in favour, and the Communists claimed that 'a plebiscite is not a democratic procedure' because 'in such an enterprise, universal suffrage is called upon to destroy itself'. Despite the Assembly's opposition, de Gaulle obtained 61.75 per cent of the votes cast. This was a net loss of 17.5 per cent by comparison with 1958, and by taking absentions into account the PCF declared that the YES votes represented only 46.5 per cent of the electorate, and that this was 'a serious defeat for personal rule'.

On the strength of the referendum results and in answer to the National Assembly's censure of the government, de Gaulle called for a General Election, which was held in November. The Gaullist UNR presented joint lists with the UDT (*Union Démocratique du Travail*, made up of 'left-wing' Gaullists), and together they got 31.9 per cent at the first ballot and 233 seats at the second ballot. For the left, the first ballot gave 21.78 per cent to the PCF, 12.65 per cent to the SFIO, and 3.71 per cent to the Radicals, and after the second ballot the PCF had 41 seats, the SFIO 66, and the Radicals 39.[10] The PCF's electoral tactics, described by Waldeck Rochet as 'a deepening and a development of the United Front tactic', were based on the principle of withdrawal in favour 'of the Republican candidate' who was best *placed*[11] to defeat the Gaullists. By 'republican', the party meant all anti-Gaullists, and in Dijon, for example, it withdrew in favour of Canon Kir, a 'progressive' Catholic priest. A significant feature of the elections was the *de facto* unity of the left between the two ballots, illustrated by the number of *ad hoc* agreements on mutual *désistements*, which benefited all the three parties. In this respect





November 1962 marked the beginning of the PCF's reintegration into the nation's political life.



In its internal life the PCF also showed signs of gradual recovery in the 1958–62 period. After losing many members in 1956–7 because of the events in the international Communist movement[12], it gradually began to gain new ones. Above all, the party's 1958 setbacks did not demoralise the membership. In a sense, sweet were the uses of adversity, for the rank and file rallied round the leadership and steeled themselves for the great battles ahead. Neither the 15th congress (1959) nor the 16th (1961) revealed any signs of unrest, at any rate not on the surface. Both these congresses were also important as landmarks in the PCF's evolution. Organisationally, the 15th congress ratified some significant leadership changes, in particular Waldeck Rochet's promotion to the secretariat, Georges Marchais's election to the Politbureau, and Roland Leroy's election to the Central Committee. Politically, it adopted a draft programme aimed at 'restoring and renewing democracy', which was interesting, first, because it spoke of an alliance between the working class and other social groups rather than of the latter 'rallying' around the former, which was the 14th congress formulation, and secondly, because such a draft contained in embryo the idea of a common government programme on which the left could agree. The stress on the importance of the 'battle for democracy' was equally significant, even if at this early stage there was no clear realisation of the way in which the democratic battle can lead to socialism. In this last respect, a modern Communist historian, Roger Bourderon, speaks of a 'hiatus between the immediate objective (renewed democracy) and the long-term one (socialism), as well as between the end and the means'.[13] Finally, the 15th congress resolution laid special emphasis on the party's independent activity as a precondition for its ability to contribute to the building of popular unity. The need for such unity was the main theme of the 16th congress. The final resolution committed the party to co-operation with 'other democratic parties, both in order to restore and renew democracy and to build socialism', and it reaffirmed the formula of the previous congress, which was also that of the 1930s, 'At all costs, united front of the working class. At all costs, unity of the working class and the middle classes'. In his closing speech Thorez reasserted the Communists' attachment to unity and revived the old slogan, *Ecarter tout ce qui divise, ne tenir compte que de ce qui unit* (Put aside all that which divides, take account only of that which unites).







He also repeated that in the PCF's view war was not inevitable and that a peaceful transition to socialism was still possible.

The battle commences (1962–5)

With the Algerian question out of the way after the 1962 Evian settlement, and with its own clearer assessment of the key to advance under the Gaullist regime (broad unity to achieve a 'new' democracy), the PCF set to work to 'mobilise' the people and to reach agreement with other political forces which were opposed to Gaullism. From 1963 onwards, it initiated and/or supported the countless strikes which took place (six million strike days in 1963 according to official statistics), especially the March–April 1963 miners' strike, the May–June strike of Parisian underground workers, and the November strike in the public services. It also supported protest actions in the countryside and teachers' demonstrations against education cuts. It seemed to the party that its 16th congress had been justified in saying that 'conditions are ripening for removing the present regime. The necessary social and political forces exist'. Unfortunately from the party's point of view, the 'political forces' may have existed, but they took a long time to get together for joint action. The first half of 1962 saw Mollet's attempt to revive the 'Third Force' without the Communists and the widening of the doctrinal gulf between Socialists and Communists at the May SFIO congress, which defined capitalism as a system in which surplus value is 'unfairly distributed'; it followed that the task was not to abolish private property (the long-standing aim of all Marxists) but to share the nation's wealth more equitably. Undeterred, the PCF continued to multiply its appeals for unity, and in September the Politbureau suggested that the two working-class parties should 'march side by side and strike together' (*Marchons côte à côte et frappons ensemble*). The appeal was heeded at grass-roots level and not entirely ignored at the December meeting of the SFIO council, which heard Mollet declare that unity of the *whole* left was needed in order to defeat the right, and his colleague, Gazier, assert that the French left was 'powerless' without the PCF, but would be 'depraved' if it co-operated with it. At its May–June 1963 congress, the SFIO agreed to 'defensive' united action with the Communists.

However, the main preoccupation at that congress was Gaston Defferre's launching of the idea of a non-Communist left 'Federation', extending from the SFIO to the centre parties, and for this reason nicknamed 'Big Federation'. When in February 1964 the



SFIO chose Defferre as its presidential candidate for the 1965 election, it looked as if the door had been closed on a rapprochement with the Communists. But in the spring of 1965, the 'Big Federation' idea collapsed, as the MRP refused to be included unless the other parties dropped their opposition to state aid for Catholic schools and unless they clearly ruled out co-operation with the PCF. After that, things moved fairly fast. In June Defferre withdrew as presidential candidate, in September François Mitterrand replaced him and offered to stand on behalf of the left as a whole, and in the same month, the 'small' Federation was formed and took the name of *Fédération de la Gauche Démocrate et Socialiste* (FGDS). It was made up of the SFIO, the Radicals and a number of left-wing clubs, of which the most significant was Mitterrand's own CIR (*Convention des Institutions Républicaines*), which had formally asked all the other parties to set up the FGDS. Mitterrand stood on the basis of a seven-point programme, and although this was not the common programme demanded by the PCF, the party thought it was the next best thing and decided to support him. He, for his part, guardedly declared that he would welcome Communist ministers in a left government.[14] When the presidential election was held (December 1965), de Gaulle failed to get an absolute majority at the first ballot (43.7 per cent against 32.2 per cent for Mitterrand and 15.9 per cent for Lecanuet) and got in at the second ballot by the skin of his teeth (54.5 per cent against 45.5 per cent for Mitterrand). The PCF greeted the results as proof that the Gaullist regime had been 'shakened and weakened', and it added that 'its defeat . . . will now depend on the success of joint actions'. For the first time since 1947 the Communists were part of a broad movement that could realistically look forward to victory in the near future.

The party's 17th congress, held a year earlier in May 1964, had already equipped it for its new role because of the further changes it made to its approach and to its organisation. Waldeck Rochet presented the opening report and called for 'unity for a genuine democracy'. The phrase 'genuine democracy' had a double significance. First, by using it instead of 'the restoration of democracy', the party intended to look to the future rather than the past, as already demanded by Thorez in 1962. Secondly, 'genuine democracy' was presented as a stage on the road to socialism. Modern Communist historians feel that the notion of stages was inadequate and that it is more correct to speak of a continuous process, but it was all the same a



great advance for the PCF to perceive at last, albeit in a general way, the links between the present and the future. On the key question of left unity, Waldeck Rochet admitted the importance of the differences between Socialists and Communists, but claimed that both parties had changed sufficiently to make these less serious. In particular, the PCF's stress on peaceful transition to socialism had rendered obsolete the SFIO's long-standing objection that the Communists *wanted* violence. That had never been the case, the speaker maintained, but now it was less true than ever. Equally obsolete was the objection that the PCF favoured a one-party system under socialism. Waldeck Rochet, recalling that the 16th congress had already rejected the one-party system, added: 'This idea, supported by Stalin, constituted an unwarranted generalisation of the specific circumstances under which the October Revolution took place.' Unity between Communists and Christians was also stressed, especially as the Papal encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*, had appealed to all men of good will, believers and unbelievers. Finally, Waldeck Rochet's outright condemnation of the ultra-left Maoist line was not only significant as showing support for Khrushchev against Mao in the international Communist debate, but also as a further indication of the PCF's commitment to a democratic road to socialism. With its 17th congress the PCF entered a new phase in its history, one which opened up greater perspectives, but which was not free from problems, as subsequent developments were to show.

The 17th congress was also important organisationally because it adopted new Rules for the first time since 1945. These were introduced by Georges Marchais, who had taken over from Servin as National Organiser. Greater emphasis was put on the need for internal democracy and for better branch life. For example, the first article no longer said that a party member 'undertakes to work in a party organisation', but simply said 'works', on the ground that a Communist's activity depended both on the individual and on the branch. Two articles defined the rights and duties of members and said that all were entitled to help in shaping the party's policy by putting forward their own points of view at all levels. All leading bodies were to be elected by secret ballot rather than by a show of hands.

As the congress ended, Thorez asked to be relieved of his post as General Secretary on grounds of age and health. He became party chairman and was replaced by Waldeck Rochet. A few weeks later, on 11 July 1964, he died, and his death left a great void in the PCF,

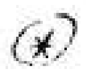
although his successors were also men and women of experience and ability. In the Central Committee, elected at Congress by secret ballot, there were about twenty new members, another clear sign that a new era had started for the party. Fauvet's assessment of Thorez's role is that he 'largely contributed to making the Communist Party "the first party in France" ',[15] but that in later years, he did not sufficiently listen to those who wanted a party that was still more 'open' and more willing to discard obsolete ideas and practices. Interestingly, this is also the view of the PCF historian, Roger Bourderon. He praises Thorez for having always been 'at ease and bold'[16] when tackling the problems of unity, but adds that his experience in this very field tended to prevent him from seeing how much things had changed since the 1930s and the 1940s. In particular, he did not sufficiently stress France's own road to socialism, despite his 'frequent references to the 1946 *Times* interview'.[16]

Open conflict (1965–8)

The PCF's new look, which began in 1964–5, was reflected first in the new impetus given to the party's ideological activity, secondly in its relations with other parties, and finally in its electoral fortunes and mass work. Debates between Marxists and non-Marxists were not new, but almost as soon as de-Stalinisation started, the stress was no longer on polemical aggressiveness but on a genuine dialogue. An attempt had been made in 1957 to hold a public debate between PCF intellectuals and three prominent Jesuits (Father Bigo, Calvez and Chambre) who had written books on Marx and the USSR, but at the last minute the three priests refused to attend. In 1965 the Church's *aggiornamento*[17] was already under way, and the PCF renewed its offer to hold public, friendly discussions between Communists and Catholics. This time the offer was accepted, and two debates took place in Nantes (April 1965). The first one was around the theme, 'Christians, Marxists, Rationalists, can we change the world together, and if so, what must we change in ourselves?' The three participants were a Dominican priest, a Communist, and a Socialist. Predictably, serious differences came to light, but two things were new, the willingness of each side to listen to the others, and the general agreement that co-operation was possible and desirable. The other debate was about *laïcité* (the secular state), and again there were three speakers, a Catholic, a Communist, and a Socialist. These debates were courteous without flattery, firm without intransigence.



Ideological activity inside the PCF itself was even more novel. Two new bodies, the CERM (*Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Marxistes*) and the IMT (*Institut Maurice Thorez*)[18] encouraged the 'creative application' of Marxism to a number of theoretical and even political problems. Party specialists also met in *ad hoc* and advisory committees and were listened to by the leadership. Genuine internal debates took place, of which the most famous was the debate among philosophers and among writers and artists. The main difference concerned the best way of fighting Stalinist dogmatism. (Although, as we shall see in the next chapter, de-Stalinisation had been initially slow in the PCF, by the mid-1960s it was in full swing.) Louis Althusser advocated greater scientific rigour, Roger Garaudy wanted a closer rapprochement with liberal humanism, and Lucien Sève called for a middle course. Althusser's most controversial views were his theory of 'the epistemological break' (according to which there is a radical discontinuity between Marxism and all previous philosophies, including that of Hegel), the distinction between science and ideology (according to which science alone provides objective knowledge, whilst ideology reflects human beings' experiences and governs their behaviour in a given society), and the startling assertion that Marxism is a *theoretical* anti-humanism (on the ground that it rejects the abstract concept of *man* and speaks of *masses*). Garaudy's views were no less controversial, and included the belief that Marxism defines man primarily as a 'creator' (which is akin to Sartre's notion of 'the project'), that literary realism 'has no limits' (i.e. that even writers who are not generally regarded as 'realists' display an original form of 'realism'), and that there are numerous 'convergences' among Christians and Marxists. (Garaudy became a Christian, then a Muslim, after his expulsion from the PCF.) As for Lucien Sève, he seemed at first more concerned with defending Marxist orthodoxy, but his 1969 book *Marxisme et Théorie de la personnalité* contains a number of original ideas, including the assertion that a 'concrete psychology' can and must be elaborated on the basis of historical materialism.



Debates and discussions about all these points were frequent from 1962 onwards, but the climax came in March 1966, when the CC met at Argenteuil for three days (instead of the customary two) and dealt exclusively with questions of ideology and culture. (Althusser, not a CC member, was not present, but Garaudy and Sève were.) It is impossible to give a full account of the meeting,[19] but one or two points deserve to be noted. For example, Michel Simon, supported by



Suret-Canale, suggested that 'anti-humanism', theoretical or otherwise, was an unfortunate phrase because it accredited the 'bourgeois' idea that Communists did not care about human beings; it would be better, the speaker remarked, simply to say that 'Marxism is not a speculative anthropology' and to stress, as Althusser had rightly done, that Marx rejected 'the abstract idea of a human essence which is independent of social relations'. The final resolution supported Simon and asserted: 'There is a Marxist humanism. Unlike the abstract humanism with which the bourgeoisie hides social relations and justifies exploitation and injustice, it stems from the historic task of the working class.' On the issue of the dialogue with Christians, Garaudy was taken to task by most participants for having gone too far. All praised his 'pioneering work' but complained that he had too readily accepted the Christian division of mankind into believers and unbelievers as fundamental instead of the Marxist division into exploiters and exploited. As he was a Politbureau member, his views might have been taken for the party's views, and so it was important to put the record straight. Lucien Sève accused him of confusing the dialogue with the attempt to find an impossible convergence between different doctrines. The purpose of the dialogue, he said, was mutual understanding and common action, not the reconciliation of the irreconcilable. He claimed that this was not intransigence, but plain intellectual honesty, and furthermore, that such honesty made for better relations, since neither side was deceiving the other. Finally, on the issue of art and literature, it was again Sève who attacked Garaudy when he said that his assumption that all great art was realistic was really dogmatic since it implied that we can only admire works of art if, somehow or other, we can label them 'realist'.

The final resolution was introduced by Aragon, who said that it was 'a compromise . . . in the best sense of the word', that it had tried to avoid jargon, and that it prided itself on NOT being a complete document, for 'we have produced too many complete documents in the past which we were the only ones to read'. The following extracts may give some idea of the party's novel tone:

> Just as the proletariat is not a barbarian camping in the modern city, Marxism is not an alien body to the world of culture. . . . There is a Marxist humanism. . . . In extending the hand of friendship to Christians the Communist Party has never concealed the opposition between materialist philosophy and the principles of all religions. Common efforts towards a better life do not imply philosophical convergence but respect for everybody's views. . . . The development of science requires debates



and research. The Communist Party does not seek to hamper these debates nor lay down the truth *a priori* . . . Artistic creation, too, cannot be imagined without research, . . . and without confrontation among [various trends]. The Party appreciates and supports the diverse ways in which creative artists contribute to human progress . . . It expresses the wish that they will understand and back up the ideological and political standpoint of the working class.

Shortly after the Argenteuil meeting, party economists met at Choisy-le-Roi to analyse and discuss the new stage of modern capitalism in France, described as 'state monopoly capitalism' to stress the increasingly close economic and political links between the state and the monopolies. The result was that, eventually, a team of PCF economists produced what they called a *Traité marxiste d'économie politique, Le capitalisme monopoliste d'état*.[20] Actually, the term 'treatise' chosen by the authors is somewhat misleading, for this was not a rehash of Marxist platitudes, but an analysis (undoubtedly Marxist) of French realities, both in terms of state intervention in the economy and of changes in the position of various classes. The last point provided a theoretical basis for the PCF's policy of building an anti-monopoly alliance by showing the existence of an objective community of interests among all non-monopoly sections of French society, despite important differences in their status, aims and outlook. It was understandable that the party should wish to stress the community of interests rather than the differences, but in later years the leadership itself felt that it had been one-sided in its emphasis. However, the 18th PCF congress, which was held in January 1967, was able to give a more concrete content to the policy of building popular unity 'for change' and to show, on the basis of the party's theoretical studies, that such a policy made sense.

The 18th congress was also able to register with satisfaction the practical steps which had been taken in 1966 towards the building of left unity. At the beginning of the year, unity in the industrial field was expressed in the joint pledge to support workers' demands taken by France's two largest unions, the CGT and the recently founded CFDT (*Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail*, founded in November 1964). Political unity followed in December with an electoral agreement between the PCF and the FGDS which provided for second-ballot mutual withdrawals. It is worth listing at this stage the further developments which occurred after 1966. In May 1967 the two parties agreed to hold regular meetings, and in June

the first of such meetings ended with a communique pledging united action on common objectives. In February 1968, a joint PCF–FGDS Declaration listed the issues on which the two sides agreed as well as those on which they disagreed, the latter concerning chiefly foreign policy, nationalisation, and constitutional revision. In May 1969, the FGDS was dissolved and a new Socialist party was formed to replace the SFIO. It took the name of *Parti Socialiste* (PS) and held two important congresses, one at Issy-les-Moulineaux in July 1969 to adopt a programme and a constitution, and the other at Epinay in June 1971, which committed the party to left unity. The Communists were of course delighted and they stepped up their pressure to reach agreement on a common programme. This was duly signed in June 1972, and we shall have more to say about it in the next chapter. What should be mentioned now is that the PCF leadership, as it later admitted, had been so overjoyed by the rapprochements which were taking place that it had failed to realise that the PS, especially under Mitterrand's leadership, was getting closer to the PCF, not only because of 'pressure from below', but also because it thought that left unity was the best way of achieving a rebalancing of the French left in its favour.



We must now return to 1967 and to the General Election which was held in that year. At the first ballot, the PCF got 22.5 per cent of the votes cast (a net gain of one million), the FGDS 19.3 per cent, and the PSU 2.2 per cent. (The PSU, or *Parti Socialiste Unifié*, was founded in 1960 by left-wing SFIO militants. It had ratified the December 1966 electoral agreement signed by the PCF and the FGDS.) The Gaullist coalition, which stood under the label of 'Fifth Republic', got 38.3 per cent, and the centre 15.4 per cent. At the second ballot the great majority of left-wing supporters switched their votes to the left candidate who stood the best chance of beating the right. Such discipline, which proved that the prospect of Communist ministers 'no longer traumatized opinion',[21] enabled the PCF to gain 32 seats and the FGDS 28. The areas in which Communists advanced significantly were industrial centres such as Lorraine (badly hit by unemployment among miners and textile workers), the Seine and Greater Paris region, the north, the Mediterranean south, the Meurthe-et-Moselle area, and the countryside constituencies of Gard, Hérault, and Pyrénées-Orientales. The new assembly included 72 Communists, 117 FGDS, 4 PSU, 233 Gaullists and 44 CD (*Centre Démocrate*). The PCF Politbureau expressed its satisfaction at 'the



decline of the Gaullist party' (it had lost 23 seats) and its confidence that the united left would 'become the majority in the near future'.

In the industrial field, the PCF supported the unions in their fight for jobs, as France was beginning to face a serious unemployment problem. On 17 May 1967, four unions (CGT, CFDT, FO and FEN)[22] called for a one-day general strike against the government's 'special powers' and for greater Social Security benefits. They were largely followed. In 1968 working-class militancy reached such a level that for the first time in many years the government did not ban the traditional May Day demonstration in Paris. At the beginning of the year, the CGT had decided to make May 1968 'the month of youth'. This is indeed what it turned out to be, although it happened in a way which surprised everyone.

'Les événements' (May–June 1968)

'On the May–June movement we do not unfortunately have any thorough studies at our disposal.'[23] However, it is possible to give a brief summary of the events and to examine the main issues they raised for the PCF. It all started with a student revolt (3–13 May); then it developed into a massive social explosion, with workers' strikes and sit-ins (14–25 May); these led to protracted negotiations and the winning of important economic gains (25 May–15 June); there was also an important political battle, which de Gaulle won in the end (17 May–30 June). The student revolt, which reached its highest point in May, had in fact begun much earlier in the year, when a number of student leaders were arrested after demonstrations expressing solidarity with Vietnam and demanding changes in French higher education. On 22 March, some three hundred students of the Nanterre faculty in Paris occupied administrative buildings and lecture halls, shouting 'Release our jailed comrades'. A group calling itself the *Mouvement du 22 mars* was spontaneously created, in which a young anarchist, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, was the most vocal figure. It soon got support from other groups, especially ultra-left groups, and from well-known *gauchistes* such as Jacques Sauvageot, the vice-president of the Students' Union (*Union Nationale des Etudiants Français* or UNEF), and Alain Geismar, one of the leaders of the lecturers' union (*Syndicat National de l'Enseignement Supérieur* or SN Esup). They were all united in their contempt for the allegedly 'conservative' PCF and CGT and in their eagerness to challenge the government by violent action.

On 3 May, as the Nanterre students refused to vacate the buildings they had occupied, the police was called in and behaved with unwarranted ferocity, making numerous arrests. The government decided to close down the Nanterre faculty, and on the following day the whole of the Sorbonne was closed down and occupied by the police. There were more arrests. On the 6th 30,000 students staged a protest demonstration, and as the police had opened fire on them, they retaliated by hurling paving stones at their assailants. On the 7th students in the provincial universities, joined by a number of junior lecturers, followed the lead of the capital. On that day the PCF secretariat issued a statement condemning 'police repression', for which 'the Gaullist regime' was held responsible, and adding that 'the students' dissatisfaction [was] legitimate'. At the same time the statement warned against 'the activities of adventurist elements'. This early pronouncement gives a fairly good indication of the party's attitude throughout the crisis: a two-pronged battle, against Gaullism and against *gauchisme*, the former being accused of encouraging the latter, which in turn played into its hands. On 8 May, the CGT attended a UNEF-organised demonstration, which turned out to be peaceful and orderly, much to the chagrin of many *gauchistes*. On the night of 10–11 May there were pitched battles in the Latin Quarter, especially in the rue Gay Lussac, between the CRS,[24] which used firearms, truncheons and tear-gas, and the students, who defended themselves with paving stones and barricades. It was then that the working class decided to intervene.

The CGT, supported by the CFDT and FEN, called for a general strike on 13 May to protest against police brutality and to express solidarity with the students. Despite Premier Pompidou's promise to reopen the Sorbonne and release student leaders, plans for the strike went ahead, and the results amply fulfilled the organisers' expectations. There were also massive street demonstrations in Paris with people chanting, 'Ten years, that's enough', a slogan which was a reminder that it was exactly ten years ago that the military putsch leading to de Gaulle's come-back had taken place. The *gauchistes* insisted on Cohn-Bendit being at the head of the demonstration. He eagerly agreed, and later spoke of his delight at having left 'the Stalinist scum' behind. Strikes and demonstrations also hit many provincial towns. For many organisations, that was the climax, but the students replied that it was only a beginning, *Ce n'est qu'un début*, and they looked forward to an imminent revolution. The PCF

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and the CGT also felt that it was necessary to 'continue the struggle' – the expression used by both of them – not in order to achieve an instant revolution but to obtain improvements for the students and the workers. The PCF added that if left-wing parties could reach agreement on an alternative government programme, 'the days of personal rule [were] numbered'.

On 14 May the movement entered a new stage, as the workers decided to exploit the crisis by taking industrial action on their own behalf. The lead was given on that day by the workers of Sud-Aviation (an aircraft factory at Nantes) who occupied their plant and locked up the boss in his office. The following day the smaller Renault factories were also paralysed by strikes and sit-ins. The CGT issued an appeal, of which it distributed four million copies, which called for action 'at a higher level' with the aim of compelling the employers to hold discussions and 'grant demands which up to now they have stubbornly refused'. The appeal also asked workers to 'act without waiting' and to decide for themselves the methods they wanted to use, pledging that the CGT would 'ensure co-ordination'. There was no specific call for sit-ins or for a general strike, which the CGT leader, Georges Séguy (who was also a Communist), later justified by saying that sit-in strikes implied 'conscious, responsible participation'[25] and could not be ordered from above. On 16 May at the Renault Billancourt factory, one of the biggest and most militant in France, the workers overwhelmingly voted for a strike and an occupation. From then onwards strikes and sit-ins spread throughout the land, and one can say with Shorter and Tilly that 'the May–June sit-down strikes were the largest mobilisation of workers in French history',[26] involving from nine to ten million people.

On 21 May the CGT and the CFDT met, but apart from undertaking to wage a joint fight against the government's social security decrees, they remained deeply divided. The CFDT wanted to stress demands for the 'self-management' of workplaces and universities rather than what it called the CGT's 'bread-and-butter' demands. The leaders of each organisation blamed the other for the failure to reach agreement, but in fact both were partly responsible. The CFDT, in its eagerness to support 'unorthodox' demands, gave the impression that it favoured them chiefly because they had arisen outside the CGT and the PCF. The CGT, on the other hand, anxious to secure wage rises and improved conditions, seemed nervous whenever other issues were raised, fearing that they might 'dis-

tract' the workers from the main fight. Yet there is little doubt that in addition to wage grievances, there was also widespread concern over participation in decision-making. Both the CGT and the PCF were slow, not to say reluctant, to acknowledge the fact.

By the end of May the government, faced with a challenge which was so far unprecedented, felt compelled to take some sort of action. On the 24th de Gaulle announced a referendum, whilst Pompidou declared himself ready to meet union representatives together with the employers. Tripartite talks were held at the ministry of Social Affairs, in the rue de Grenelle. They were attended, on the unions' side, by delegates from the CGT, the CFDT, FO, FEN, the CFTC and the CGC, the last one being the union of managerial and supervisory staff, the *Confédération Générale des Cadres*. Despite the fact that six unions were present, at their own request, it was the CGT which the *gauchistes* chose to attack for having agreed to negotiate with the 'bourgeois' employers and the 'bourgeois' government. The talks started on 25 May at 3 p.m. and the first session lasted no less than twelve hours. At 3 a.m. on the 26th no agreement had been reached on any issue except the raising of the national minimum wage, or SMIG as it was called then,[27] by 35 per cent. During the break, Pompidou had separate talks with each of the unions. According to Séguy he tried to get the CGT's co-operation, first by pointing to de Gaulle's pro-Soviet foreign policy, and then by promising to repeal the discriminatory measures against the CGT in the workplaces. Still according to Séguy, he himself replied that the first issue was irrelevant and that on the second one, his union would 'never agree to barter the end of discriminatory measures . . . for the workers' demands'.[28]

The talks finally ended in the early hours of 27 May. The employers had made important concessions, but the unions did not commit themselves to anything definite before consulting their members. The first consultation, at Renault Billancourt, revealed that the workers were in a fighting mood as they voted unanimously to continue the strike in view of the government's refusal to grant more than it had done. The following day the CGT called for massive national demonstrations on 29 May, and was supported in this by the PCF. In Paris, about 800,000 people marched through the streets, demanding further concessions as well as de Gaulle's resignation. In the end, the government and the employers were forced to hold talks with each branch of industry and to go well over half way in meeting the



workers' demands. The average wage increases ranged from 12 to 20 per cent; the working week was cut by one hour in some cases and two in others; extra paid holidays were granted, ranging from one to nine days a year; union rights were extended and guaranteed; and most workers got either full pay or half pay for the strike days. The last rearguard action was fought by the government in the nationalised factories. One car factory, at Flins, was occupied by the police. At the Peugeot plants, the police opened fire on the strikers, killing one and wounding many others. As all French trains and machines came to a halt in protest for one hour (12 June), the government had to give in and grant many of the demands. The CGT recommended a return to work, whilst the CFDT and FO sat on the fence, and its recommendation was endorsed by majorities of 70 per cent or over in most plants, except at Flins, where the figure was 58 per cent only.

If the CGT was naturally in the forefront in the course of the industrial battle, it was the PCF itself which waged the political battle. Its first move was made on 17 May, when it offered to meet the FGDS and discuss a common programme which could be presented to the people as an alternative to Gaullism. On 18 May, Waldeck Rochet publicly demanded the formation of 'a popular and democratic government'. The call was repeated in a Politbureau statement of the 20th, which also spelt out what, in the party's view, the situation demanded: '. . . neither a patching up of the regime of personal rule nor an insurrectionary strike, but . . . the setting up of a genuinely republican régime, opening up the way to socialism.' The party also appealed to the people, asking them to form 'action committees for a popular government of democratic unity'. On the 23rd it once again demanded a common programme, adding that so far it had approached the FGDS without success. If neither the FGDS nor the PSU was willing to commit itself to a joint programme with the PCF, it was because they hoped they could come to power alone. In their attempt to isolate the Communists they were supported by the CFDT and the *gauchistes*, as became clear at the 27 May meeting held at the Charléty Stadium. The meeting, organised by the CFDT and the UNEF, and attended by Mendès-France, was virulently anti-CGT and anti-PCF. Both organisations were described as 'objective allies of the regime'. On 28 May, Mitterrand held a press conference and forecast that de Gaulle would be defeated in the referendum. He offered to stand as a presidential candidate himself and he suggested the formation of a provisional government to be

headed by Mendès-France. There was no mention of a common programme with the PCF, nor had the latter been consulted beforehand, although Mitterrand had met the PCF leaders the evening before.

It was at that stage that de Gaulle decided to regain the initiative. He had just returned from a flight visit to Baden-Baden where he had discussed with Massu and other top generals contingency plans for crushing the May revolt by force if necessary, and in his confident mood he decided to address the nation. In his broadcast he gave the lie to those who had thought or asserted that he was about to resign. He withdrew his earlier offer to hold a referendum (on Pompidou's advice, it is believed) and announced instead that he would dissolve Parliament and hold fresh elections. He also blamed the whole of the left, and the PCF in particular, for the terroristic violence of the *gauchistes.* The PCF immediately replied by accepting the challenge. On 1 June its delegates met those of the FGDS, and the two parties reasserted their previous electoral agreement on mutual second-ballot withdrawals. They also extended their February 1968 Common Declaration concerning the social and economic measures they both advocated. On the 12 June, Waldeck Rochet declared in the course of a TV interview that 'the choice [was] not between Gaullist rule and the introduction of communism into France', but between 'a sharpened form of personal rule' and 'a democratic regime' in which Communists had a role to play. In the same TV speech, he defended his party's rejection of '*gauchiste* adventurism', saying that it had thus avoided a blood bath and 'the setting up of a military dictatorship'.

The first ballot was held on 23 June and gave the following results:

	Votes	*Percentage of votes cast*
PCF	4,434,832	20.3
FGDS	3,684,165	16.6
PSU	865,848	3.1
Other left	160,000	0.7
Centre	2,756,423	9.8
UDR (Gaullists and Independents)	10,281,998	36.5
Other right	nearly 1m.	4

The PCF Politbureau did not disguise its disappointment, but claimed that de Gaulle had exploited the fear of civil war. After the second ballot, the composition of the new Assembly was as follows:

	Seats
PCF	34 (−39)
FGDS	57 (−61)
PSU	0 (−4)
Other left	2
UDR	349 (+116)
Centre	31 (−13)
Other right	4

Despite the massive challenge to his regime, de Gaulle had won again. The PCF complained that this was not due merely to the fear of anarchy, but also to the unfairness of the electoral law: for example, according to the party, 134,000 votes were needed to return one PCF deputy, whereas a mere 27,000 were enough for a UDR deputy.

David Goldey's assessment of the June 1968 elections deserves attention. His verdict is that 'the French voted massively for order and a quiet life',[29] both symbolised by the Gaullist party which cleverly exploited the people's fear of anarchy. (The essay is significantly entitled, ***The party of fear: the election of June 1968***.) As for the Opposition, it gets its fair share of blame. The students are charged with having had a 'strategy of polarisation' which had 'catastrophic results for their political revolution', and the Communists are accused of having been 'reluctant revolutionaries'.[29] The author points out that the PCF losses ranged from under 4 per cent to about 8 per cent and were particularly serious 'in the east and west, Burgundy and Champagne, and Dordogne, Lot, and Pyrénées Orientales'.[30] Finally, he mentions a Paris survey taken on 27 May which '. . . showed that public confidence had increased in the trade unions (including the CGT) but had turned against the students and all the political parties (including the Communists)'.[31] Such a survey should have revealed to all, and especially to the PCF, that there is no automatic correlation between industrial militancy and support for the political left.



The first issue raised by May–June 1968 is the movement's social character. Benoit Frachon summed up the PCF's view when he described it as 'the greatest class confrontation of the contemporary epoch, the epoch of state monopoly capitalism'. According to the party, the two main classes involved were the workers and the big bourgeoisie. The former were said to have given the lie to those who had asserted that they had become spineless, for it was their militancy which had constituted the biggest challenge to Gaullism, not the students' barricades. Such militancy was backed up by discipline and

organisation, and the CGT's 'co-ordinating role' was praised. As for the big bourgeoisie, the PCF refused to believe, like most others on the left, that it had lost its head. Although it was taken by surprise, it adapted its tactics to a fast-changing situation. At first, it encouraged violent confrontation, then it tried to trap the opposition into believing that there was a 'power vacuum', and finally, it speculated on fear and launched the electoral battle. When the PCF CC met in July, Waldeck Rochet said: 'In effect the calculation of the government was simple: in the face of a crisis which it had itself provoked by its anti-social and anti-democratic policy, it counted on using the crisis to strike a decisive and lasting blow at the working class, at our Party, and at all democratic movements.'

The PCF also thought that the sharpening of the class struggle had provided the working class with new allies – the students, the intellectuals, and to a lesser extent the middle strata. Because of their comparative inexperience and different backgrounds, these allies, although officially welcomed by the party, were regarded as troublesome and unreliable, and the Communist leadership's mixture of caution and aggressiveness in dealing with them (and not only the leadership's) simply widened the gap instead of narrowing it. With regard to the students, the PCF, as an orthodox Marxist party, insisted that they do not and cannot play an independent role because they are remote from production, lack bargaining power, and are a transient social group. On the other hand, the PCF also said that modern students are the 'natural allies' of the working class because they are threatened with unemployment or dead-end jobs, because of the 'undemocratic' character of higher education, and because they are exposed to 'bourgeois ideology'. Unfortunately these 'natural allies' by-passed the workers' mass organisations (CGT and PCF) and mostly fell under the *gauchistes*' influence. As a result, their claim that they were 'anti-bourgeois' was belied by their novel interpretation of the terms 'bourgeois' and 'proletarian'. For the *gauchistes*, the hallmarks of the proletariat were a rejection of routine and convention, a Bohemian style of life, and resort to violence. As for the bourgeois, they included all those who stuck to 'the traditional methods of struggle', who bothered about public opinion, and who cared about material improvements. The CGT was 'bourgeois' because it fought for 'bread-and-butter' demands and was willing to negotiate with the employers; the PCF was 'bourgeois' because it rejected violence and sought to change the government by legal





means; any union leader was a 'bourgeois' – and a 'bureaucrat' to boot – if he wore a collar and tie.

It is difficult to discuss the students without mentioning youth in general, because May–June 1968 was also an explosion of youthful exuberance. Young people rated their elders for their alleged 'conservatism' and lack of imagination. They thought that 'imagination [had] taken power' thanks to their own involvement (a witty PCF commentator replied that it did not keep it!) and that now was the time to 'be realistic: demand the impossible'. Moreover, to them May 1968 was a huge festival, *une fête*, which gave them a chance to sing, dance, drink and make love. It was a welcome change from the grimness usually associated with politics, but the PCF took it upon itself to warn that the class struggle was also a grim battle. Whilst claiming to appreciate the enthusiasm of young people, the party felt threatened by it, and its vitriolic attacks on 'irresponsible leaders', justified though they may have been, could only alienate the youth.

With regard to the intellectuals, the PCF thought that they, too, could not play an independent or leading role because they are remote from production (in Marxist terms they constitute a stratum rather than a class), but that many 'objective factors' place them on the side of the working class. One is that science is now a direct 'productive force', another is the greater correlation between physical and mental labour, and a final one is the growth of a 'culture industry'. As in the case of the students and youth, the alliance did not take the form which the PCF would have wished, for the two teachers' unions, FEN and SNEsup, acted independently of the CGT and even of the CFDT. The support given to the students by many lecturers was deemed by the Communists to have been praiseworthy, but what was less so in their view was the adoption of *gauchiste* tactics. These had the effect of driving a wedge between the 'vanguard' and the rest, and according to the PCF, many who would have supported a 'democratic' reform of education were asked to choose between 'bourgeois' and 'socialist' education, the latter being presented as the rejection of tradition and the emphasis on free expression.

The appeal of *gauchisme* did not leave PCF intellectuals unaffected. Some – probably the majority – reacted by attacking ultra-left theories and by defending the party's policy and Marxism, but others criticised the leadership, especially for its decision not to support a demonstration in protest against the government's decision to deport Cohn-Bendit, who was technically a foreigner since he was of Ger-

many nationality. They were told by Waldeck Rochet that 'such demonstrations, accompanied by barricades and outbreaks of fire . . . simply played into the hands of the Gaullist regime'. What Waldeck Rochet did not discuss was whether a PCF presence might have restrained the *gauchistes*, nor did he dispel the belief that the PCF leaders were secretly pleased that Cohn-Benedit had been deported. Such a belief was further strengthened when Marchais described the ultra-left leader as a 'German anarchist' in *L'Humanité*, which may have been factually true, but was an unfortunate phrase.[32]

With regard to the middle strata, and particularly white collar workers, the PCF thought they were torn between their desire for a better life and their fear of lawless disorder. It was not good enough, the party asserted, to pooh-pooh their fears, as the *gauchistes* had done; they ought to have been won over to a policy of social progress within the framework of legality. But the PCF itself was not blameless, for it did not pay sufficient attention to their specific interests, and it tended to dismiss as 'petty bourgeois' their concern for such issues as 'participation' (taken up by both the *gauchistes* and the Gaullists), women's liberation, and the environment.

The other important issue raised by May–June 1968 was the PCF's role in it. The right-wing charged it with 'subversion', the non-Communist left with 'impotence', and the *gauchistes* with 'cowardice'. The party itself claims it was not guilty of any of these faults and that it set itself three aims throughout the crisis – first, to involve the people against the regime; secondly, to avoid 'adventurism'; and finally, to bring down the government by legal means. It claims to have been successful in respect of the first two aims, but – through no fault of its own – not about the third. That it encouraged mass action, mostly through the CGT, cannot be denied, but we have already seen that it largely ignored issues which were not strictly economic and political. As for its ability to avert civil war, which according to Waldeck Rochet was 'its greatest merit', it is acknowledged by some people outside Communist ranks. For example, in *Le Mois de mai du général*,[33] J. R. Tournoux refers to de Gaulle's Baden-Baden trip and adds that the PCF's rejection of a violent uprising might have been due to the fact that it had been secretly informed of the government's plans through leaks from army headquarters. The *Cahiers du communisme*[34] replied that the PCF had not had access to any secret plans, but that it had taken quite seriously the threat constituted by the presence of army units on the alert around and outside Paris.



Another non-Communist, R. Tiersky, thinks that the party was right to declare that the situation was not revolutionary. To prove their point, the Communists used once again the Leninist argument that a revolution is ripe only when the rulers *cannot* rule in the old way and when the people *no longer want* to be ruled in that way. They pointed to de Gaulle's control of the 'state machine' (especially the army and the police) and to the fact that 'the more central concern of the workers was for shop-floor, not national political matters'.[35] Tiersky comments that 'One does not have to accept the French Communists' political theory to agree with them that in contemporary France a violent change of regime . . . is quite unlikely'[36] and that 'While some of the state security forces undoubtedly went through a crisis of allegiance to the regime in May 1968 . . . unquestionably any attempt by the Communists to seize power by violence could not count upon a mass rally to their cause, or even neutrality'.[37]

The failure to achieve the third PCF aim – a change of government by democratic means – was due, as the party said, to the disunity of the left, which the PCF repeatedly tried to overcome. However, this does not mean that the PCF failed merely because the non-Communist left was uncooperative. At that time, the PCF itself did not have a credible alternative based on a thorough analysis of French realities. Neither had it managed to win over the social sections which are drawn towards 'reformism' (either of the Gaullist or the social-democratic kind). As for its then idea of unity, which involved *first*, agreement on a common programme 'at the top', it is today strongly criticised by the party itself. Finally, the split in the international Communist movement which had started in 1961[38] contributed to the weakening of the PCF's influence and prestige. We shall have to return to these important points in the following chapters. Meanwhile, we must briefly look at the party's other weaknesses in May–June 1968 and at the lessons the CC drew from the events.

The first weakness was the PCF's nervousness and defensive attitude when faced with demands it had not initiated or was not used to. This made the charge of Communist 'conservatism' appear much more credible. The same fear of novelty made the PCF unnecessarily virulent in attacking the ultra-left. It was silly (because untrue) to lump all the *gauchiste* 'grouplets' (the *groupuscules* as they were contemptuously called) in the same bag as if the differences among them were too trivial to matter. It was equally silly to overlook the potential value for Marxists and socialists of such demands as

decentralisation and self-management and to hand these over to the ultra-left on a silver plate. (This mistake has now been overcome to such an extent that the PCF's description of the socialism it wants for France is *le socialisme autogestionnaire.*) Finally, although the PCF sensed that all the participants in the May movement (or most of them) were eagerly seeking radical solutions, it did not really show the link between the immediate struggle against Gaullism and the struggle for socialism, except in a very general way. From its point of view, it was of course right to warn that the socialist revolution was not yet on the agenda, but it did not offer a clear, detailed perspective of the steps that could lead to it.

It was mainly in order to remedy this shortcoming that the CC met in December and drew up its Champigny Manifesto, a programme significantly entitled 'For an advanced democracy, for a socialist France'. The novelty of the Manifesto lay in the presentation of 'advanced democracy' as a half-way house on the way to socialism and in the fact that the notion of a 'model' to be copied (the Soviet 'model' of course), which had dominated the party's thinking for so long, was entirely absent. This last point was not only a response to the May events, but also the first clear sign of the PCF's independence in relation to the international Communist movement. As for the concept of 'advanced democracy' itself, although it recalled in some ways Togliatti's ideas on 'democracy of a new type', it had never been formulated by the PCF before. It was neither reformist in the old sense, since the reforms it advocated were 'structural' and intended to 'open up the way to socialism', nor revolutionary in the traditional sense, since it envisaged a left-wing coalition, with Communist participation, to lead the country, step by step, on the way to socialism. The social basis of such a coalition was 'the broad anti-monopoly alliance in which the working class plays a leading role'.



Notes

1 *Colons* in the French word for settlers.
2 In theory, 'mass work' always comes first for Communists, but in periods of electoral setbacks it is especially stressed.
3 A. Cobban, *op. cit.*, p. 247.
4 *Ibid.*, p. 248.
5 D. Johnson, in R. Mettam and D. Johnson, *French History and Society* (Methuen, 1974), p. 148.
6 For further details about the PCF's assessment of Gaullism, cf.

R. Bourderon, in *Etapes et Problèmes*, especially pp. 462–77.
7 Ceretti, *op. cit.*, p. 352.
8 Casanova was accused of not fighting hard enough for the party's point of view whenever there was a disagreement between the PCF and the Peace Movement, although he was expected to abide by the Movement's decisions.
9 The extreme left was mainly represented by the PSU (cf. p. 183).
10 Actually, the Radicals were part of a broader coalition, which included twenty-six Radicals proper and a number of other groups, such as Mitterrand's UDSR.
11 'Best placed' did not necessarily mean arithmetically ahead, but standing a greater chance of defeating the right.
12 Cf. below, Ch. 8, p. 234.
13 R. Bourderon, *op. cit.*, p. 466.
14 His actual statement was that the PCF's participation did not depend on him, but that he would like 'all the left parties to put aside their differences and unite around a government programme'.
15 Fauvet, *op. cit.*, p. 519.
16 R. Bourderon, *op. cit.*, p. 508.
17 This Italian word means 'bringing up to date'.
18 These two have now merged into the IRM (*Institut de Recherches Marxistes*).
19 For a full report, cf. *Cahiers du communisme* (May–June 1966).
20 Cf. *Le capitalisme monopoliste d'état*, 2 vols (Editions Sociales, 1971).
21 P. M. Williams and D. Goldey, in P. M. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 213.
22 FEN (*Fédération de l'Education Nationale*) is the teachers' union. It is outside any confederation.
23 J. Burles, in *Etapes et Problèmes*, p. 528.
24 The CRS (*Compagnie Républicaine de Sécurité*) is under the War ministry's control. It was created under the Fourth Republic.
25 G. Séguy, *Le Mai de la CGT* (Julliard, 1972), p. 40.
26 Shorter and Tilly, *op. cit.*, p. 140.
27 The initials SMIG stand for *salaire minimum inter-professionnel garanti*. Today the minimum wage is known as the SMIC, *salaire . . . de croissance* (i.e. index-linked).
28 G. Séguy, *op. cit.*, p. 101.
29 D. Goldey, in *op. cit.*, p. 261.
30 *Ibid.*, pp. 275–6.
31 *Ibid.*, p. 281.
32 He was not called 'a German Jew', as was sometimes asserted. After all, the phrase might apply to Karl Marx!
33 Published by Plon in 1969.
34 Cf. issue dated March 1969, pp. 124–6.
35 Shorter and Tilly, *op. cit.*, pp. 141–2. The authors add that the demand for workers' control inevitably became 'a political demand' in the public sector, but even so the workers who put it forward were not ready to resort to arms in order to obtain satisfaction.

36 R. Tiersky, *op. cit.*, p. 399.
37 *Ibid.*, p. 398.
38 Cf. Ch. 8, pp. 235–7.

CHAPTER 7

'In the colours of France' (1969–78)

A year after its June 1968 electoral setback, the PCF achieved a remarkable score in the presidential election, which was caused by de Gaulle's resignation in April 1969 after his defeat in a referendum about regional devolution and senate reform. The Socialists having refused a joint left-wing candidate, seventy-two-year-old Jacques Duclos was put up as a PCF candidate, and he conducted his campaign by saying that he wanted to represent 'the union of working-class and democratic forces'. The results of the first ballot (1 June) came as a great surprise to all observers:

	%
Pompidou (Gaullist)	44
Poher (centrist)	23.4
Duclos (PCF)	21.5
Defferre (Socialist)	5.1
Rocard (PSU)	3.7
Ducatel (right)	1.2
Krivine (Trotskyist)	1.1

No one, perhaps not even the party itself, had expected a Communist to be third on the list and to get one fifth of the votes cast. As for the Socialist, Defferre, he cut a pretty sorry figure with his paltry 5.1 per cent. For the second ballot, the PCF advised voters to abstain, claiming that a choice between Pompidou and Poher (who was pro-EEC, pro-NATO, and as 'reactionary' as his rival on home policy) was really a choice between Tweedledum and Tweedledee, or rather as Duclos put it, between *blanc bonnet* and *bonnet blanc*. The fact that nearly nine million people actually abstained (30.9 per cent) was hailed as a second victory for the party. With Pompidou as the final winner (57.6 per cent against 42.4 per cent for Poher), the Fifth Republic entered its second phase – that of Gaullism without de Gaulle.

A little over a year after the Champigny Manifesto, the PCF's analysis of French society became more thorough and more detailed, with an important landmark being Marchais's article in *L'Humanité*



(June 1971), significantly entitled '*La société française est en crise*'. The Communist assessment of this crisis was – and still is – that it affected all aspects of social life – economics, politics, social relations, culture and morality. Its root cause was deemed to be the inability of 'state monopoly capitalism' to find permanent solutions, so that the issue of 'changing society' was now on the agenda. Such an assessment represented the climax of the party's theoretical work, which had begun in 1966. The starting point of the analysis was the orthodox Marxist proposition that the basic contradiction of capitalism, at any stage in its history, is the contradiction between private ownership and social production. But the party went on to say that today this contradiction is best illustrated by the phenomenon of 'over-accumulation'. On the one hand, more and more capital is being accumulated thanks to the modernisation of production under the impact of the new technological revolution, but on the other hand, a great many factories are being closed down, resulting in the growth of unemployment. The PCF explanation is that the total amount of 'surplus value'[1] produced is not sufficient to bring to the whole of accumulated capital a sufficient rise in profits, and that as usual under capitalism, the stronger firms eliminate the weaker ones. The factories which are closed down are not the most backward, in fact quite the reverse, but they are those which would claim such a share of the total profits that they would force the most powerful industrial and financial groups to be content with average rather than maximum profits. In this respect, the state plays a key role and favours the monopolies, especially when it allows public funds, derived from taxes, to be used extensively. According to Jean Burles, the mad logic of the system is that it leads to 'its own destruction'.[2] But the author immediately warns against a 'fatalistic' approach, stressing first, that capitalism develops in a contradictory fashion – there is progress as well as decline, modernisation as well as destruction – and, secondly, that no social system ever perishes under the strain of its own inner conflicts, so that it must be destroyed by the class/classes which most suffer from its effects. Hence the great PCF emphasis on the need for working-class struggles and for militancy on the part of all social sections; hence also the need for the Communist party to 'raise the level of people's consciousness' by showing them that their fight is necessary – in order to stop the tendency of the system to destroy more productive forces, material and human – and that it can succeed – since capitalism is unable to overcome the crisis it has itself created.

To list all the struggles initiated or supported by the PCF in the seventies would require a whole book. It is enough to mention two of their chief characteristics. One is the wide range of issues – for wage and pension rises, against curtailment of SS benefits, for improved working conditions, against closures and redundancies, against inflation and high prices, for better social services (education and health included), for better housing and lower rents, and finally for an extension of democratic freedoms. The other characteristic is the PCF view that each of these struggles, although limited to specific objectives, was bound to be a challenge to the regime. For example, Marchais told the 21st PCF congress that when workers fight to keep their factories running, they are not merely fighting for jobs, but that they also '. . . deny that the law of maximum profit for big business should dictate the government's economic decisions; they put forward solutions which imply the curbing of the monopolies'.

The three main events in the decade under review are the Common Programme (signed in 1972), the 22nd congress (held in 1976), and the breakdown of the left summit (September 1977), followed by the left's General Election defeat in March 1978.

The Common Programme (1969–74)

The signing of the Common Programme in June 1972 was preceded by a three-year battle during which tough negotiations took place between the two main partners, the PCF and the PS. In addition, each party was trying to put its own house in order. For the PCF, the process included the holding of its 19th congress in February 1970 and the adoption of a programme for 'changing course' (*Changer de cap*) in October 1971. The 19th congress was important politically and organisationally. Politically, it reasserted the party's commitment to 'advanced democracy' as a transitional stage towards socialism, and it rejected the views of Roger Garaudy. Garaudy's disagreements with the leadership went back to 1968 and concerned four issues. First, he wanted the party to drop Marxism as its 'official philosophy' (to which the leadership replied that it was 'a guide to action' and not an 'official philosophy'); secondly, he claimed that the scientific and technological revolution had led to the formation of a new 'historical bloc', in which 'organised intelligence is in the process of becoming the main productive force' (to which the leadership replied that this was overstressing technological changes at the expense of social relations and the class struggle and amounted to destroying the party's working-



class character); thirdly, in his 'French model of socialism', there was no room for agreements with other political parties (because they had all become obsolete apart from the PCF) or for an alliance between workers and intellectuals (because both were part of the same 'historical bloc' (to which the leadership replied that the whole analysis rested on false, unproven premises); finally, he wanted the party's organisation to be 'pluralist', with various trends co-existing and continuing to argue for their views after majority decisions have been taken (to which the leadership replied that this was introducing 'factions', much as Garaudy had protested that this was not his intention). In addition to these strategic differences, crucial tactical differences included Garaudy's claim that the PCF had mishandled the situation in May 1968, especially with regard to students and intellectuals, and that it had not gone far enough in condemning the USSR after the military intervention in Czechoslovakia.[3] Garaudy was criticised at the 19th congress, although he was allowed to speak, and was expelled in April 1970. In June, together with Tillon and two other dissidents, he attacked the leadership of the PCF in an 'Appeal' to all party members. (Tillon was not formally expelled, but he himself refused to take up a party card in July 1970, after his branch had recommended his expulsion but before the CC had had a chance to ratify or reject the recommendation.) The organisational importance of the 19th congress was the removal of Garaudy from the leadership and the election of Marchais to the post of Assistant General Secretary, in the absence of Waldeck Rochet who was seriously ill. (He never recovered and died in February 1983.)

The adoption of *Changer de cap* was meant as a contribution to the talks on a common programme with the Socialists, and one million copies of the document were sold within a few weeks. It included a number of socio-economic measures to improve working people's lives, proposals for 'democratising' France's political system, profound structural reforms such as nationalisation of the monopolies and the main industrial firms, proposals for economic expansion and fiscal reform, and a foreign policy programme based on disarmament, peaceful co-existence and international co-operation. The final section declared that only a government of 'popular union' could achieve these aims and that the programme presented by the PCF was not a take-it-or-leave-it package deal but a basis for discussion among the left. In March 1972 the PS replied with its own programme, *Changer la vie*. Unlike the Communist programme, it did not openly refer to a



government of 'popular union', but said that Socialists would govern 'with the support of a left majority' without specifying the form this 'support' would take. On socio-economic issues, the programme envisaged nationalisations and even 'collective appropriation', but the emphasis was on self-management (*l'autogestion*). Finally, the Socialist remedies against inflation stemmed from the theory that higher prices were due to lack of competition and thus involved government measures to encourage competition as a means of compelling firms to reduce their prices.

Considering the great differences between the PCF and the PS programmes the compromise reached in 1972 was all the more remarkable. The public announcement that agreement on a Common Government Programme had been reached was made by Marchais and Mitterrand at 5 a.m. on 27 June. It was the first time in France that left unity had been achieved on the basis of a comprehensive programme whose fundamental aim was to make inroads into the power of big business, or to use the words of the 1974 Labour Party manifesto in this country, to bring about 'a decisive shift in the balance of wealth and power in favour of working people and their families'. The Common Programme (which was shortly afterwards endorsed by the dissident left Radicals known as the *Mouvement des Radicaux de Gauche*, or MRG) began with a preamble which said that the PCF and the PS wanted to keep their 'separate identity' but that this did not 'jeopardise their will and their ability to govern together'. Four sections followed. The first one, 'Social policies', pledged that a left government would raise wages and improve social services. The second section, 'Economic policies', included (after hard-hitting discussions) the pledge that as soon as a left government took power, the country would cross 'a minimum threshold of nationalisations'. These affected nine key industrial groups, commercial and investment banks, and large insurance companies. The third section, 'Political system', was also the result of a compromise, and included the curtailment of the President's powers, proportional representation, the promise to resign if the government lost the assembly's or the people's confidence, and the opposition parties' right to exist, provided they respected the law. The fourth section, 'Foreign Affairs', was a further compromise, and it included France's retention of EEC membership together with the promise that she would try to free the EEC from the domination of big business, acceptance of a European defence agreement together with the pledge

that the French government would work for disarmament and the end of military blocs, and international co-operation.

Although the signing of the Common Programme was a great victory for left unity, it soon became apparent that the two parties had been actuated by very different motives. The PS had signed the programme in order to weaken its Communist rival, the PCF had signed it in order, as Marchais put it to the CC, to create 'the most favourable conditions for setting the masses in motion around *our* ideas, *our* solutions, *our* aims'; that, however, did not involve weakening the PS, if only because at that stage, it certainly did not require any further weakening. The Socialist strategy, especially Mitterrand's, involved reducing the PCF to the role of junior partner and then only to include it in a left coalition the better to control it and contain it. This strategy, announced by Mitterrand in 1969, became clear for all to see in 1981, when the PCF was included in the government, not so much in spite of its electoral setback but because of it. In his 1969 book, *Ma part de vérité*, Mitterrand put the matter as follows:

> . . . the unity of the left requires [*passe par*] the Communist party. But the unity of the left . . . is far from being a sufficient condition. Socialist democracy, in order to be able to exert its *leadership* [the English word is used] within the new majority, must extend its appeal on its left (by the rigour of its economic programme) and on its right (by its political liberalism). Hence the importance I attach to the formation of a political movement which can, first counterpoise the Communist party, then dominate it, and finally detain by itself, in itself, a majority vocation [*une vocation majoritaire*].[4]

A day after signing the Common Programme, he told a meeting of the Socialist International in Vienna: 'Our fundamental objective is to build anew a great Socialist party on the ground which is occupied by the Communist party itself, in order to prove that out of the 5 million Communist voters, 3 million can vote Socialist. This is the reason for the agreement [on the Common Programme].'[5]

The PCF leadership's assessment of the Common Programme was given by Marchais, first at a CC meeting held on 29 June, and then at the 20th party congress in December 1972. In his CC report[6] he said that for Communists the Common Programme should lead to a powerful mass movement with the aim of building a new democracy, opening up the way to socialism. With regard to the pledge of resignation after an electoral defeat, he claimed it was not a grudging



concession on the PCF's part, because it corresponded to what the party had stressed 'in the recent period'. Whilst welcoming the PS's firm commitment to left unity, he warned that 'it would be dangerous to have the slightest illusion about the Socialist party's sincerity . . . on this issue' and that the best guarantee was 'mass vigilance and mass pressure to ensure loyalty to the Common Programme'. After mentioning the most important concessions made by both sides, including the Communist one of agreeing to France's retention of tactical nuclear weapons, he concluded by saying that the agreement did not represent an 'ideological synthesis' between the PCF and the PS, 'for at bottom the ideology which guides the Socialist party today is and remains wholly reformist'. Marchais's report was an honest account of the true position, as it included both the achievements and the problems, but it was unfortunately silent on the novelty of the party's stand on a number of issues, especially the Communists' pledge to respect the people's electoral verdict. It was all very well for him to say that it was in keeping with the party's pronouncements 'in the recent period', but first, it was a very recent period indeed, and secondly, it did constitute a radical break with the past. In the past, Communists had really evaded the issue of alternation by saying it would not arise under socialism since people who make a revolution never put the clock back. What was new was, first, the party's commitment to a transitional stage, 'advanced democracy', in which the issue was bound to arise, and secondly, the Communist commitment to peaceful revolution, under which the struggle between socialists and their opponents takes the form of electoral contests and not of armed resistance to armed counter-revolution. Had Marchais mentioned these points, he would have provided his own members with much needed arguments to justify the new approach, to answer queries, and possibly to silence hostile critics.



At the 20th party congress Marchais's opening speech was mostly a detailed commentary on the Common Programme. What was especially significant was that Marchais himself was elected to the post of General Secretary, as Waldeck Rochet's illness was so serious that he was incapable of any 'physical and intellectual work', and that in his new capacity, he fought for the implementation of the Common Programme with greater vigour. Equally significant was the presence of PS and MRG delegates, both of whom claimed they were not impressed by the government's anti-Communist attacks. A final importance of the congress was that it reported a membership increase

and a strengthening of the party in the factories.

The signing of the Common Programme had two interesting electoral sequels. The first one was the March 1973 General Election. At the first ballot, the PCF and its partners presented separate candidates, but the PS and the MRG fought under the joint label of *Union de la Gauche Socialiste et Démocrate* (UGSD). The results were as follows:[7]

	%
PCF	21.3
UGSD, PS	18.9
MRG	1.5
PSU and *gauchistes*	3.3
Other left	1.3
Government coalition (URP)	34.5
Pro-government right	4.0
Other right	2.8

The PCF gained 700,000 votes by comparison with 1968 and about a hundred thousand by comparison with 1967. However, its percentage was 1.2 per cent lower than in 1967. The PS vote, on the other hand, had gone up considerably, so that it was the Socialists rather than the Communists who had gained most from the Common Programme. The regional results confirmed the national trend: the PCF vote was up in three regions, stationary in six, and down in thirteen; the PS vote was up in thirteen regions, stationary in two, and down in seven. The second ballot brought practically no surprises, but although the united left was ahead in terms of votes (43.2 per cent as against 42.9 per cent for the government coalition), the URP retained a handsome majority of seats, having been helped by the distribution of electoral boundaries in the country. Left discipline was good, both among the candidates and the voters. The new assembly had 73 Communists, 102 UGDS, 1 PSU, 268 URP and 12 Independents.



As the unity of the left had benefited the Socialists more than the Communists, Marchais dealt extensively with this fact in his CC report after the elections. After saying that the leadership had expected the PS to achieve a more spectacular advance than the PCF, he gave four reasons for it. One was that PCF members had not had time to publicise the Common Programme and their party's role in it; a second one was the government's crude anti-Communist propaganda (a return to '*l'anticommunisme de papa*'); a third was that the PS had indulged in some anti-PCF antics itself; and a final one was that the PS's new image had helped it to appear as a more reliable



force for change than the PCF.

About a year after the elections, a presidential election had to be held because of Pompidou's sudden death. On the right, the main challenger was Giscard d'Estaing, who had been Finance Minister in previous governments, and who pledged 'change within continuity', the former being expressed by a liberal attitude towards the middle classes and the intellectuals, the latter being ensured by rejecting the economic and political alternatives proposed by the Common Programme of the left. On the left, Mitterrand was chosen as the single candidate. It is worth noting that the main issues of the electoral campaign – social measures, nationalisation, democracy, foreign policy, and the possibility of PCF government participation – were those the Common Programme had raised. The impact of the programme can be measured by the fact that in 1973 about ten million people had voted for it (in voting left), whereas in 1974 eleven million people voted for the Common Programme candidate in the first round, and nearly thirteen million in the second round, the last figure representing about half the total. Mitterrand's support came from 70 per cent of the industrial workers, 50 per cent of the white collar workers, 40 per cent of the peasants, and the majority of young people; however fewer women voted for him than for Giscard, 48 per cent and 52 per cent respectively. By comparison with 1973, he improved the left-wing vote in about fifty *départements* and in a number of large and medium-sized towns, but in some thirty *départements* the percentage was lower. These variations are not easy to explain in the absence of a thorough analysis, but one reason may be the difference between a presidential election and a parliamentary election. At the second ballot Mitterrand picked up about two million votes and was defeated by Giscard by a very narrow margin, 49.1 per cent and 50.8 per cent respectively. Understandably, the PCF leadership regarded the results as a 'remarkable victory' for the Common Programme and for its own policies. Many non-Communist commentators agreed that, in a sense, Mitterrand rather than Giscard had been the real victor and that this was partly due to the PCF's wholehearted support.

The PCF leadership did not rest content with hailing Mitterrand's near victory, it also tried to analyse the reasons which had prevented it from being a complete victory. Marchais first tackled the issue in his June 1974 CC speech and said that what was missing was the support of many people who traditionally vote for the right. These, he

asserted, could be won over by showing them that the Common Programme, although drawn up by the left, was in the interests of the overwhelming majority, and he added that it was 'a question not only of breaking through the 50 per cent barrier needed for an electoral victory', but of creating 'a situation which will enable the democratic changes to be carried through under good conditions'. A few months later, in October, the PCF held an extraordinary congress (the 21st) to discuss the new stage of the struggle after the presidential election, and in his opening report, Marchais declared: 'France cannot be divided into two halves whose interests are diametrically opposed. The decisive dividing line is between, on the one hand, the great mass of the French people who live by their work and serve the country, and on the other hand, the narrow caste which owns and dominates the economy and the state.' It was therefore necessary to extend left unity and build a 'Union of the French people' (reminiscent of the 'French Front' proposed in 1936). Such a union should first be based on a *class* basis; the working class, the white collar workers, the middle strata, the intelligentsia, the peasants, and even small and medium capitalists, all had a common enemy – monopoly capital. Marchais claimed that 'the extension of exploitation by Big Business to all social groups apart from a handful of lords of industry and finance' was the 'objective basis' of the policy proposed. Secondly, the Union of the French People was meant to include the great 'ideological families' of France, the Marxists, the Christians, the republican humanists, and even the Gaullists because their concern for independence set them against Giscard's 'Atlantic policy'. The alliance should also include women and young people. The only people who were deliberately excluded, and indeed against whom the alliance was aimed, were the top layers of capitalist society, the modern 'two hundred families' who, in the PCF's view, had grown smaller in numbers but stronger in wealth and power. The party stressed that their exclusion meant that there was no question of a return to the *union sacrée*, which rested on 'class collaboration' and not on the class struggle.

In his report, Marchais also dealt with PCF–PS relations, which had begun to deteriorate. He complained that the PS's 'project for a socialist society' had made it forget the less ambitious but much more urgent Common Programme. He also referred to the Socialists' ambition of rebalancing the left. After saying that the PCF, too, wanted to become stronger, he claimed that competition should take place

within the left alliance and not with the aim of weakening one partner so that the other's will can be imposed on it. 'Such a policy,' he said, 'can lead neither partner to victory.' Finally, Marchais spoke about the relationship between the Common Programme and socialism, saying that one did not 'automatically' lead to the other. A hard struggle was still necessary to win over the majority of the French people to the ideas of socialism. 'When the time comes,' he concluded, 'it will be for the people of our country . . . to decide. As already stated, we shall respect its verdict.' The details of the French road to socialism, 'socialism in the colours of France', as the party is fond of calling it (by using Aragon's image in his 1945 poem, which asserted: *Mon parti m'a rendu les couleurs de la France*), were to constitute the main theme of the historic 22nd congress.

The 22nd congress (1976)

The 22nd congress was held in February 1976 and represented a turning point. In as much as congresses can be said to be landmarks in a party's history, one can assert that the PCF was born at its foundation congress in 1920, that it began to grow up at its eighth congress in 1936, and that it came of age at its 22nd congress in 1976. The chief novelty of this last congress was that it committed French Communists to an original 'democratic road to socialism'. The phrase implies the willingness to use existing democratic forms (e.g. Parliament) and to extend them to their utmost limits, *la democratie poussée jusqu'au bout*. It also assumes that the socialist revolution in France will be a peaceful one, excluding civil war. Such a perspective, which was envisaged as a possibility in a small number of cases by Marx, Engels and Lenin, has become realistic today because, according to PCF commentators, the balance of forces has changed internationally and nationally: the enemy has become weaker because 'imperialism' is challenged by the socialist countries and the national-liberation movement in former colonies and also because the social base of 'monopoly capitalism' is considerably narrower. The main ingredients of the new PCF strategy are its independence in relation to any existing 'model', its rejection of 'the dictatorship of the proletariat', and its commitment to 'pluralism'. Let us briefly examine each of these points.



The first one was not strictly new in principle, since it had been cautiously suggested by Thorez in his 1946 *Times* interview, but it was the first time that the party was going beyond the assertion that



national conditions should be 'taken into account' and was actually basing the whole of its approach and policy on them. Moreover, for the first time ever at a PCF congress, strong criticisms were voiced of some aspects of life in the Soviet Union, and these concerned precisely the 'limitations on democracy' which marred the country's other achievements and gave a distorted image of socialism. Finally, whilst recognising the existence of 'universal laws' of socialism, the congress insisted that no two socialist countries were alike and that a socialist France would not be a mechanical copy of other nations' experience. With its 22nd congress, the PCF had decisively opted for its own version of 'Euro-communism'.[8]

It was in the course of a TV interview, during the pre-congress discussion period, that Marchais first suggested that 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' should no longer be one of the PCF's aims. A number of critics complained that the membership should have been consulted beforehand, but whatever misgivings there may have been concerning this aspect of the matter, the proposal itself was widely and hotly debated throughout the party before it was finally endorsed by the 22nd congress. Marchais told the delegates that it was justified on two grounds, first because the word 'dictatorship' is now associated with fascism, and secondly because other social sections, and not just the proletariat, are now in favour of socialism. The first of Marchais's points was not just semantic. Apart from the fact that the word 'dictatorship' had acquired anti-democratic connotations never intended by Marx,[9] it also recalled the 'iron hand' used in Russia during the civil war. With the peaceful road proposed by the PCF, coercion takes on a different aspect: it is still necessary to 'coerce' open foes, but by law, not by force. Unlike the Bolsheviks, who had only Tsarist laws at their disposal when they took power, the European revolutionaries who choose 'the democratic road' will be able to use the 'progressive' legislation introduced under transitional regimes such as 'advanced democracy'.

The second point was more crucial since it reflected a deep historico-sociological change, the fact that other classes apart from the proletariat have been won over to the ideas of socialism *before* the revolution. When Lenin argued that only one class should take power and *then* use it to get the support of the rest of the people, he did so because he believed that in Russia, for example, the peasants had been 'brainwashed' by centuries of obscurantism and that it was therefore utopian to expect them to accept socialism before they could see it



work. Today, however, the prospect of a majority of the people demanding socialist solutions is no longer an illusion, and the PCF concluded that the socialist state which is likely to arise in France will be, from the start, the state of the working class and its allies rather than the state of the proletariat alone. It is such a perspective which the party wanted to stress by discarding 'the dictatorship of the proletariat'. However, as the aim had been a long-standing one, the unanimous decision to give it up at the congress may be misleading. Resistance to the idea was strong: for example, according to *L'Humanité* (27 January 1976), at the Gironde district congress the discussion on this issue lasted fourteen hours and ended with two delegates voting against the leadership, twelve abstaining, and some among the 324 who voted in favour probably doing so out of discipline rather than conviction. Prominent party intellectuals, such as Althusser, expressed their complete disagreement; others, such as Sève, vigorously defended the decision.[10]

The commitment to 'pluralism' was another striking novelty. The word 'pluralism' has three meanings for Communists – the rejection of the one-party system of government, the toleration of a legal opposition under socialism, and the co-existence of different ideologies. The first aspect is common to most Communist parties of the post-Stalin era and envisages that socialism can be built by a coalition of parties rather than by a single one. The second aspect is more controversial and is generally accepted by Euro-communist parties only. The case for it made at the PCF 22nd congress was that pluralism is implied in the peaceful road to socialism, as the latter involves methods of persuasion and education in dealing with dissidents rather than the destruction of political opposition by force or by administrative means. Against the sabotage of former rulers, the PCF thought that the 'socialist law', 'the people's vigilance' and the weakening of the economic basis of capitalism would be sufficient safeguards. Moreover, socialist pluralism according to French Communists, stems from the confidence that in a fair contest between socialism and its critics, socialism is sure to win, and from the realisation that merely to outlaw hostile parties is the surest way of creating martyrs, as Engels pointed out when he condemned the abolition of religion by 'state decree'. Finally, the PCF argument is that criticism is a valuable check on the action of any government. An important consequence of the PCF's commitment to pluralism was that the 22nd congress reasserted that Communists would respect the people's

verdict 'in all circumstances' and that they 'categorically rule out all resort to oppression, totalitarianism, and personal power'. This new language met with some opposition inside the party, as some people expressed the fear that pluralism would 'legalise counter-revolution', and with scepticism on the part of some outside critics who suggested that the record of Communists in power was hardly pluralistic.

With regard to ideological pluralism, the 22nd congress resolution said that the PCF was in favour of 'the free expression of many trends of thought, within the respect for the spiritual families which reflect the history of our people'. The idea that France should have an official philosophy under socialism – Marxism – was rejected. An article in the *Cahiers du communisme* asserted that this would be against the very spirit of Marxism, which as a science, does not need to impose itself institutionally, and as a doctrine based on dialectics, realises that ideological debates reflect contradictions in the real world and that their suppression would spell the end of intellectual progress. The article also suggested that the high quality of the contributions made by Marxists in some socialist countries 'owes absolutely nothing to the "official" status given to Marxism'.

Other interesting aspects of the 22nd congress were the party's proclaimed 'respect for diversity' and its defence of moral values. According to the PCF, the working class is made up of all those who produce 'surplus value' by their manual or mental labour and it should not lose its distinctive identity in the so-called *front de classe* which the PS talks about and which is 'a single class' rather than 'an alliance between the working class and the middle strata'.[11] When the Communists ask other social groups to unite with the working class, they do not ask them to become workers but to keep their own personality and to join the broad popular alliance 'as they are'. For example, Marchais asserted that the PCF's appeal to managerial and supervisory staff, the *cadres*, is as follows: 'We do not tell the *cadres*: Become workers, behave like them, live like them. No, we tell them: you are *cadres*, and that is good. . . . you can rely on us to ensure that you find your place alongside the working class . . . just as you are . . . The popular union needs you and you need it.' With regard to moral values, the congress resolution had a paragraph entitled *We want brotherhood*, which said that the end of exploitation 'will help the whole of society to rise to a higher moral level and will encourage the emergence of new moral values'. But the text of the resolution cannot give an idea of the sharp inner-party debates which took place



on this issue. At the Moselle district congress, the section on morality was rejected by 101 votes to 79, with 14 abstentions. Fear was expressed that Communists had become upholders of conventional, 'bourgeois morality'. Outside the party, right-wing and liberal critics complained that the PCF was being either hypocritical or arrogant in charging others, the 'bourgeois', with moral shortcomings. At the congress, Jean Kanapa replied to both left and right criticism. He claimed that the PCF, because it was the party of the working class, was ' . . . the party which respects human personality, the party of fairness, of justice, of brotherhood, of generosity, of decency'. Rejecting the view that these were 'bourgeois values', he went on to say that the modern bourgeoisie had no time for morality, and he concluded: 'Yes, the working class recaptures *that as well* from the bourgeoisie.'

One criticism that may be levelled at the 22nd congress is that it hardly contained self-critical analyses of the party's past, except by implication. There was no overt reference to Communists' former errors, above all no analysis of why they had arisen. This was particularly regrettable when the same people were heard saying the opposite to what they had been saying a few years back. Whether self-critical discussions took place in the districts and in the cells we have no way of telling, but they were certainly conspicuous by their absence at the congress itself. However, despite this weakness, the 22nd congress was the most vivid illustration that the PCF had changed. According to Fauvet, it had changed 'at least as much as in the thirties, probably more than during the Resistance'.[12]



Two aspects of the change deserve a brief mention. One is the party's internal life, the other is its attitude towards intellectuals. A noticeable feature of the former is that inner-party democracy, always recognised in theory, had been extended in practice, with the leadership frequently having to defend its views instead of imposing them. Jean Elleinstein, in a book he wrote before he became a dissident, reported that a woman journalist who joined various political parties in order to test them from the inside was surprised to discover that the nine members of her PCF cell freely said what they had on their minds. She also realised that she had made a mistake in donning 'proletarian' clothes because the other female 'comrades' 'knew their fashion credo to the latest jeans'.[13] Moreover, until 1978 individual PCF members were able to write in 'bourgeois' journals or to have books published by 'bourgeois' firms without incurring the leadership's wrath, although it felt at times that an authoritative 'refutation'



was called for. There have been no major expulsions since 1970, and Marchais even claimed that 'the time of expulsions is over'. After 1978 this liberal climate was slightly modified, and we shall see in the last chapter that a few intellectuals were in fact expelled, or rather, to use the official euphemism, that the CC registered that 'they [had] put themselves outside the party'.[14] The membership growth has been consistent throughout the years, reaching over half a million members in 1976. The number of factory cells, which went up from 5,680 in 1973 to over eight thousand in 1976, testifies to the party's solid working-class implantation.

'The party of the 22nd congress', as it now likes to call itself, could also boast of a record number of intellectuals inside its ranks. Whereas in the 1920s 'workerism' made for tense relations with the intellectuals, and whereas in the Popular Front and liberation periods, intellectuals joined the party mostly as individuals and in order 'to rally the working class', the latest trend has been one of a mass influx of intellectuals. On the one hand, they themselves joined not just to help the workers but to defend their own interests, and on the other hand the rest of the party and the leadership in particular showed a greater understanding and flexibility towards them. In June 1977 Marchais asserted: 'We need you precisely because you are intellectuals. . . . In return, it is the duty of intellectuals to understand . . . that there is no solution for them . . . outside an alliance with the working class.' In 1974 two non-Communist journalists made what they called a 'journey inside the Communist Party', i.e. they interviewed a large number of leaders and ordinary members. All the intellectuals they spoke to confirmed that they felt they were 'first-class citizens' inside the party and not outsiders who had to be tolerated. Francis Cohen added that 'today it is in relation to his own activity as an intellectual that the intellectual contributes to the party'.[15] All this does not mean that the period was free from conflicts between intellectuals and the party. Far from it. The leadership's stress on 'the poor' and its alleged tactical somersaults were a source of frequent criticism on the part of intellectuals.

Whilst the PCF was busy putting its own house in order and getting a new image, political life in France had not stood still. At first it looked as if the unity of the left, achieved by the signing of the Common Programme, was going to be matched by a comparable unity on the right. For, after winning the 1974 presidential election, Giscard, not himself a Gaullist, had appointed the Gaullist leader, Jac-



ques Chirac, as his Prime Minister. But on both sides the semblance of unity was misleading. Just as the PS and the PCF soon drifted apart, a rift soon appeared between the Giscardians and the Gaullists. It came to a head when Chirac resigned in August 1976, and shortly afterwards broadened the Gaullist party and renamed it RPR, or *Rassemblement pour la République*. He tried to combine the old Gaullist *mystique* with non-left opposition to the monetarist policies of Giscard and his new Prime Minister, Raymond Barre. The aim of the so-called *plan Barre* was to combat inflation by reducing the money supply and by cutting expenditure and borrowing, both public and private. Whatever one might think of the merits of monetarism, it did not succeed in curbing inflation; nor did it manage to prevent unemployment from rising by 30 per cent in three years. Moreover, as the plan concentrated on those industries which were considered '*rentables*' (i.e. those which paid their way and made high profits), it led to widespread closures. Giscard and Barre argued that external factors were to blame, and they advocated the integration of the French economy within a west European economy, closely linked to the USA. Hence a foreign policy which involved a rapprochement with both the EEC and the USA, and was thus a significant departure from de Gaulle's approach.

Chirac's resignation led to new party alignments. In order to meet the RPR's challenge, Giscard's *Parti Républicain* (the new name taken by the Independent Republicans in 1977) decided to merge with Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber's Radical party (now quite separate from the Left Radicals or MRG)[16] and with Jean Lecanuet's CDS, and thus form a broad centre–right coalition, the UDF, or *Union pour la Démocratie Française*. Although the Gaullists were slightly ahead of their rivals in the 1978 and 1981 General Elections, the UDF did much better than the RPR in the 1979 European elections, and in 1981, it was Giscard d'Estaing, not Chirac, who faced Mitterrand at the second ballot of the presidential election. His defeat weakened the UDF, of course, but a rebalancing of the right at the Gaullists' expense cannot be ruled out.

Death of the Common Programme (1977–8)

In March 1977 the PCF proposed joint meetings to the PS and the MRG in order to 'update the Common Programme' in the light of the changes which had occurred between 1972 and 1977, especially the growth of unemployment (from half a million in 1972 to one and a half



million in 1977), the higher cost of living, Giscard's 'austerity policy', and 'the increased subordination of French foreign policy to that of the USA and the FRG'. The party also claimed that the approach of a General Election made it urgent to 'update' the 1972 programme and to make a comprehensive list of the firms to be nationalised. On 17 May a meeting of the three parties took place at which Mitterrand stated that the whole thing could be got over in one hour as it merely involved altering a few figures here and there. PCF delegates insisted that much more than this was at stake, and, reluctantly, Mitterrand agreed that a working group of fifteen people (five from each party) should be set up. On 19 June, Mitterrand told the PS congress that his party should achieve a 'dominant position' within the left and that Socialists had better things to do than spend a lot of time on the revision of an already agreed Common Programme, for their first duty was to complete their own specific programme. At the end of July the three-party working group reported on the issues which had been agreed upon and on those which still remained in abeyance, and it was decided that a summit conference should be held on 14 September.

The delegations of the three left parties, headed by their respective leaders, duly met on that day. On the PCF's behalf, Marchais expressed the hope that agreement would be reached, and he denied that the Communists wanted 'a second Common Programme' or were trying 'to replace the Common Programme with a Communist programme'. Half way through the talks, the MRG leader, Robert Fabre, walked out of the meeting and publicly accused the PCF of 'overbidding' its partners. The Socialist silence could be interpreted – and was so interpreted by the PCF – as condoning the charge, but Marchais denied it and wrote in *L'Humanité* that the Communist proposals were based on 'the existing needs of our people and our country'. He also urged the Left Radicals to return to the conference table, which they agreed to do on the 21st. The resumed talks dealt with the most important bone of contention between the two sides – nationalisation. The Communists insisted that in speaking of nine industrial groups, the Common Programme had meant both the parent companies and the subsidiary firms they controlled (*les filiales*), but the PS and the MRG denied this. As a concession, Marchais announced that the PCF had reduced its list from an initial 1,008 to 729 *filiales* to be nationalised, claiming that this figure represented an absolute minimum. The PS, for its part, was not prepared to go any higher than 200. What was also at stake was the



nature of nationalisation. The PS view was that it amounted to the takeover of the financial holdings of the firms concerned, whereas the PCF wanted the removal of existing owners and their replacement with what it called a system of 'democratic control'. The split was ideological rather than tactical. For example, Michel Rocard – who had become one of the PS's chief economic experts – said that control mattered more than ownership, but for the Marxist PCF, one was impossible without the other.

Other contentious issues included the SMIC and wage rises in general, incomes, and defence policy. On the first one, the PS eventually agreed to a SMIC increase 'in the light of 1977 realities', as proposed by the PCF, but would not commit itself to further revisions in 1978. On the second issue, the PS rejected the PCF's proposed capital tax and wealth tax, as well as the Communist suggestion that income differentials should be in the ratio of five to one. In a pre-summit broadcast, Mitterrand had said that such a ratio did not even exist in the Soviet Union, but the PCF claimed to be 'astounded' that a French Socialist should base his argument on what was happening in the USSR. On defence, the PS favoured a *European* nuclear strike force, but the PCF wanted a left government to retain the *French* nuclear force. There was some irony in the situation, first because Mitterrand had been a member of the 1956 government which had equipped France with nuclear weapons, and secondly because until 1977 the PCF had been a stern critic of this move. The party's new stand caused a good deal of surprise, not least among PCF members, who were faced with a *fait accompli*. The leadership argued that the situation had changed and that there was no time to consult the membership, but it is hard to see why an emergency debate could not have been arranged. Be that as it may, the reasons for the PCF's revised attitude were given by Jean Kanapa when he told the CC that conventional armaments had sunk to such a low level that they were no longer adequate for defence. He added: 'We did not want France to equip herself with nuclear weapons. . . . And if our country did not already possess them, we would certainly not propose equipping it with them today.'

On 23 September it became clear that no agreement could be expected between the PCF and its partners, and the left summit was adjourned *sine die*. Each side naturally blamed the other for the breakdown and subsequently spent a lot of time arguing about 'responsibility'. Technically, both were 'responsible' – the PS and the

MRG because they hardly made any concessions, the PCF because it clung to a 'minimum' beyond which it openly said it would not go. What was more important, however, was not so much the behaviour of each delegation at the talks but the deep political motives behind it. According to the PS – and to quite a few non-Communist commentators – the PCF no longer wanted left unity because it had strengthened the Socialists at the Communists' expense. That, in the PS's view, was the main factor, but in addition the PCF was charged with a 'dogmatic' attachment to 'collectivism', which prevented it from seeing that a 'mixed economy' was the only realistic solution. It was also accused of resorting to 'demagogic promises' in order to regain its influence, and finally of being at best lukewarm towards a left electoral victory because the Soviet Union favoured the *status quo* in western Europe. The PCF rejected all these charges and claimed that the 'reformist' PS had swung to the right because it felt strong enough to do without the Communists and because it had yielded to the double pressure of the French bourgeoisie – always eager to drive a wedge between the two working-class parties – and of the Socialist International – which was equally anxious to drive a wedge between Mitterrand and Marchais, just as it had done between Soares and Cunhal in Portugal. Moreover, the PCF did not deny that it was disturbed by the PS's growth, but it claimed that past experience had shown that a strong Socialist party and a weaker Communist party had always led to 'class collaboration' and to unprincipled alliances between the Socialists and the right. Historically, it is difficult to deny that the PCF argument was strong, but there was one major flaw in it. It ignored the fact that what it called the 'reformist temptation' of the PS leaders was also the temptation of an important section of the French people – the new middle strata and even the workers in the less 'dynamic' industries. Here, we touch upon one of the biggest problems facing French Communists in the contemporary period, viz. how to build a broad alliance in which revolutionaries play a leading role whilst the majority have not been won over to revolutionary ideas. The problem is not so much to convince that majority that a *future* socialist revolution is desirable, but that the *present* requires radical solutions, 'real change' as the party repeatedly says. We shall have to return to this issue in the final chapter.

Shortly after the breakdown of the left summit, the March 1978 General Election was held. The first ballot results were as follows (12 March):




	Votes	Percentage of votes cast	
PCF	5,870,402	20.6	48.6
PS	6,451,151	22.6	
MRG[16]	603,392	2.1	
PSU & *Gauchistes*	953,088	3.3	
RPR[17]	6,462,462	22.6	46.5
UDF[17]	6,128,849	21.5	
Other right	684,985	2.4	
Ecologists	612,000	2.1	
Miscellaneous	793,274	2.8	

On 13 March an agreement was signed by Marchais, Mitterrand and Fabre, pledging mutual second-ballot withdrawals, resumed discussions in case of electoral victory, and three-party representation in a left government in proportion to their strength. Despite this last-minute attempt to save left unity, the second round gave the government parties a slender majority of 50.49 per cent (12,865,122 votes) against 49.29 per cent for the left (12,553,262 votes) and 0.22 per cent for other groups (57,418 votes). The distribution of seats was:

PCF	86	
PS	104	200
MRG	10	
RPR	153	
UDF	104	257



For the left, the most significant aspect of the results was that for the first time in France's post-war history, the Socialists were ahead of the Communists. The PCF position was stationary because the three-quarter million votes it gained were offset by its percentage decline.

During the electoral campaign both the PCF and the PS took their stand on the Common Programme, with the former saying: Vote Communist to force the PS to 'return' to the Common Programme, and the latter: Vote Socialist in order to implement the Common Programme, not a Communist programme. The Communists' slogan was 'real change', the Socialists', 'sensible change'. Moreover, both parties openly referred to the need to rebalance the left, with the PCF appealing for a big increase for its candidates, and the PS saying that at least seven million votes for the Socialists were needed. Of the two, it was the PS which came nearer to achieving its target, as it got 6,400,000 votes at the first ballot. It did not, however, take three million votes away from the PCF, which was Mitterrand's declared

objective in 1972, and one journalist commented that he 'had lost his wager'.[18] With regard to the PCF's fortunes, *Le Monde* spoke of 'a slow decline',[19] but *Ouest-France* charged the Communist leaders with having chosen 'the strengthening of the party amidst defeat rather than the weakening of the party amidst victory'.[20] The party's most serious loss was in Paris (a drop of 3 per cent). In the provinces its vote was slightly up in eight regions, but slightly down in twelve others. Some gains were made in traditional Socialist 'bastions' (e.g. Pas de Calais, Haute Vienne and Haute Garonne). In working-class centres, it did not lose anywhere and even improved its position in some areas, which led the leadership to speak of 'a class vote', i.e. a vote which meant commitment to change as understood by 'the party of the working class'. At the second ballot, left discipline was better than had been expected, given the demoralising effect that the bickerings among alleged partners was bound to have. Nearly all PCF voters supported a Socialist or a Radical in the second round, but the number of PS voters who did not support a Communist was in the region of 30 per cent (when the challenger was RPR) and 35 per cent (when the challenger was UDF). This is a high figure, but not higher than in 1973. What is almost certain is that the 1973 defections stemmed from indifference whereas in 1978 they were caused by hostility and resentment.

The 1978 election was inconclusive and brought no joy to either the government or the left. All observers were agreed that the left's defeat was due to its disunity, but the big question was: what was the root cause of this disunity? According to non-Communist opinion, the answer to this question was beyond doubt: it was the PCF which had caused the defeat of the left by making impossible demands on its partners. The PCF leadership, on the other hand, claimed in a Politbureau statement (20 March) that 'the French Communist Party bears no responsibility whatever for this situation'. The Politbureau invited the whole party to 'draw all the lessons' from the recent battle and announced that the CC would meet at the end of April to assess the position. The internal debate launched by the leadership soon became a very heated one, and in addition to policies, it also hinged on inner-party democracy, i.e. the extent to which the rank and file are consulted and can influence decisions. A number of party members wanted the discussion to take place in the party press and not only in the branches, but the leadership rejected the suggestion by invoking the party Rules. Unfortunately, it was soon discovered that the rules

were silent on this point, and Marchais fell back on what he called 'a working rule in the party' (*une règle de fonctionnement du parti*), which was not very convincing. The promise that the 1979 congress would look at the matter did little to destroy the impression that the party leaders were nervous and were afraid of the *contestataires*.

The most vocal of these *contestataires* were the thousand or so who signed an Open Letter, originating from a university branch at Aix, which was critical of the party's handling of the PS and the MRG. It is difficult to estimate the precise number of dissidents, and the voting figures given by the CC in June do not tell the whole story because they do not reveal how many members kept quiet out of loyalty whilst continuing to have misgivings. For what they are worth, these figures showed that about one hundred branches out of 27,000 and three area committees out of 2,600 had expressed their disagreement with the leadership. However, an unprecedented number of critical books began to appear, all written by people who said they had no intention of resigning but wanted to change the party from within. The best known of the *contestataires* were Althusser and Elleinstein, both of whom wrote a series of articles in *Le Monde*. Although the two were philosophically and politically poles apart, they agreed that in September 1977 the PCF leadership had taken up an 'unyielding attitude' (Elleinstein's phrase) and that it had been concerned with 'weakening the PS at any price, even if it involved sacrificing the Union of the left' (Althusser's criticism). Both demanded that inner-party discussions should be 'horizontal' – between branch and branch – as well as 'vertical' – between branches and higher bodies.[21]

Marchais replied to his internal critics at the April 1978 CC meeting. Without naming any of them, he rejected all their arguments and, at one stage, scathingly referred to 'desk-bound intellectuals'. It was an unfortunate phrase (which led to spirited protests), but it would be unfair to regard his impatient outburst as a 'workerist' attack on intellectuals as such, because in the same speech he described the alliance of the working class and the intellectuals as '*une affaire capitale*'. His main defence of the leadership's recent actions was that if Communists had yielded more in 1977, it would have meant giving up urgent social and political measures. He added that it was by no means certain that the left would have won on the basis of a wishy-washy programme and that if it had in fact won under such conditions, the chances of making the PS change course would have been slimmer than ever. With regard to the 13 March agreement, which

some of the critics had called a sham, worthless agreement (*un accord bidon*), he said that it did contain a number of definite PS and MRG pledges, and that in any case, it was either this agreement or nothing. On the broader issues involved, he asserted that the crisis had, paradoxically, created both a desire for change and a fear of change; that building a 'union of the French people' was a complex matter because it involved bringing together diverse elements, among whom conflicts are bound to arise; and finally, that the PCF was still strong electorally, and above all, industrially. He reported a record membership figure of 632,000. In the last part of his speech, entitled 'And now . . . ', he said that left unity remained the PCF's objective and that the party had 'no spare strategy'. It simply had to find new ways of building unity. That, he said, would be done in the weeks ahead and at the 1979 congress. The congress would also have the task of improving the party's democratic life. Without discussing the proposal for a 'horizontal debate', Marchais came out against a 'permanent debate', on the ground that this would 'dismantle the party in the name of vague petty bourgeois anarchism' and that 'permanent discussion paralyses decision and action'.

A significant event at the end of 1978 was the series of discussions and debates organised by the leadership on 9 and 10 December, at which four hundred party intellectuals, including the most vocal *contestataires*, were invited. *Le Monde* commented that 'nothing like this had taken place in the PCF, not at any rate for forty years'. The paper added that despite continued disagreements, the leadership was, on the whole, supported 'on the essence of its policy'. One must also mention Claude Willard's 1978 revised edition of his book on *Socialisme et communisme français*,[22] in which the PCF historian was critical of his own party's 'tactical mistakes' and 'blunders'. He rejected the view that the PS had *shifted* to the right by saying that Mitterrand had made his intentions clear on the day after he had signed the Common Programme (an allusion to his Vienna speech), but he praised his party's leadership for having attempted to prevent 'a social-democratic era of unlimited duration'.[23]

From the point of view of the PCF's evolution, the 1969–78 period presented a number of contradictory features which can be differently expressed but all amounted to the same, almost paradoxical phenomenon of growth and decline at the same time. The growth and the decline were two sides of the same coin, with one influencing the other, and vice-versa. An admirable example of Marxist dialectics,



perhaps, but poor comfort to the Marxist party! There was a steady membership growth and a consolidation of the party's working-class influence and implantation and at the same time a stationary electoral impact and a failure to win over other social sections; there was the achievement of left unity and the fulfilment of a long-standing aim – a common government programme – and at the same time the loss of Communist influence and the spectacular 'rebirth' of the Socialist party because of that very programme; there was the fact that the PCF had become a national force to an extent that even the Popular Front and the Resistance–Liberation Communists might have envied and at the same time a series of signs pointing to the semi-impotence of this great force and to its inability to shape events in the direction it wanted; there was the 22nd congress firm commitment to a 'democratic road' and at the same time suspicion of the Communists' democratic credentials.



Leaving aside transient reasons, two main factors may be singled out to account for such a situation, the evolution of French society, and the way in which the Socialist party benefited from it. In May 1968, new social strata had entered the struggle, and the PCF had at least the merit of having been the first and probably the only party to have appreciated the May events in this light. These new social strata – the technicians, the *cadres*, the intellectuals, and to a lesser extent, the farmers – were initially drawn towards *gauchisme*, but as soon as *gauchiste* tactics had revealed their utter bankruptcy, they turned, not towards the main challenger of *gauchisme*, the PCF, but towards the PS, whose mixture of moderate and ultra-left phraseology proved a greater attraction. Again, it was poor comfort to the Marxist party that this easy switch from ultra-left romanticism to technocratic reformism brilliantly illustrated Lenin's Marxist assessment of the petty bourgeoisie as a class whose socio-economic instability is reflected in political instability. The most vivid expression of the switch was perhaps Rocard's evolution from PSU *gauchisme* in 1968 to technocratic, virulently anti-Communist reformism in 1974, when he entered the PS and fought within it against a rapprochement with the PCF. If the PCF was unable to attract all these social forces, it was mainly because they were very susceptible to anti-Communism owing to their background and way of life, but also because the party's democratic 'new look' had the unexpected effect of making the Socialists appear more reliable since *they* had been singing the virtues of 'democratic socialism' for years.

The PS was able to exploit the evolution of French society to its advantage, not necessarily because its leaders were cleverer than the Communists – they may have been, but that was not the decisive factor – but because the alternative it offered the newcomers in the struggle was an alternative to both what they knew and had come to dislike – Gaullism, with or without de Gaulle – and to what they did not know and feared – communism, with or without the 'Euro' label. The PS's 1969 electoral setback did not mark the end of reformism, but the end of one form of reformism, that of the Fourth Republic SFIO, with its record of unsuccessful 'Third Forces' and 'Republican Fronts', of undignified participation in colonial repression (Vietnam, Algeria, Suez), and at the beginning of the Fifth Republic, of hasty support for de Gaulle. Under Mitterrand's able leadership, the new PS was determined to throw the SFIO heritage overboard, to commit itself to left unity, and to draw social support from the middle strata, all of which would help it to supplant the PCF and become the dominant party of the left. By 1978 it was well on the way to achieving these aims. For the PCF, this represented one of the most serious challenges in its history, since it raised the basic issue of its own distinctive identity. It had to decide whether it would try and beat the Socialists at their own game by diluting its socialist aims and revolutionary nature (as it seemed tempted to do in the immediate aftermath of the Common Programme) or whether it would reassert them in such a new manner that they would be seen to be more credible and more realistic than PS solutions. In other words, if it chose the latter alternative (which it did), it had to show that the 'socialism in the colours of France' which it was advocating was the concrete answer to France's problems rather than a rehash of 'models' to be found in the works of Marx, Engels and Lenin, or in the experience of existing socialist countries. To those who claimed that changes within the working class, the widespread urbanisation of the French population, the emergence of new middle strata (who, for the time being, were drawn towards the PS *Front de classe* because they were afraid of being 'swallowed up' by the working class), the rise of new movements such as the women's movement, the youth movement, the movement for the defence of the environment and the like, had all contributed to make socialism obsolete, the PCF had to prove that '*socialisme à la française*' was in fact the only solution to these very problems. Such proof had to be provided theoretically as well as practically, the second aspect involving a new approach to left unity.



It is the search for this new approach which dominated the 23rd congress (May 1979) and the 24th congress (February 1982). However, before examining these important congresses, together with the developments of the 1979–84 period, we must cast a glance at the way in which the PCF came of age in relation to the international Communist movement. This will be the object of the next chapter.[24]

Notes

1 Marx called 'surplus value' the additional value created by workers over and above what they produce to satisfy their own needs. Surplus value is the source of the capitalist's profit, whereas the other value created by the workers is returned to them in the form of wages.

2 J. Burles, *Le Parti Communiste dans la société française* (Editions Sociales, 1979), p. 35.

3 Cf. below, Ch. 8, p. 238.

4 F. Mitterrand, *op. cit.* (Fayard, 1969), p. 75.

5 F. Mitterrand, reported in *Le Monde*, 30 June 1972.

6 The report was not published until three years later, a delay which Marchais himself criticised as an 'opportunist mistake'.

7 The URP (*Union des Républicains de Progrès*) included the Gaullist UDR (*Union des Démocrates pour la République*), Giscard's Independent Republicans, and the centre.

8 For a fuller description of this aspect, cf. Ch. 8, pp. 238–46.

9 In using the phrase Marx had simply meant that all state forms were dictatorships, since they rested on the fact that one class *dictated* its will to the rest of society because it had force and the law on its side. To him, the proletarian dictatorship was the rule of the 'immense majority'.

10 Both Althusser's and Sève's articles are available in English, the first in *New Left Review* (July–August 1977), and the second in *Marxism Today* (May 1977).

11 Cf. *L'identité du Parti socialiste* (PS leaflet, March 1978).

12 Fauvet, *op. cit.*, p. 590.

13 Elleinstein, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

14 Cf. Ch. 9, pp. 254–5.

15 F. Cohen, reported in A. Harris & A. de Sédouy, *Voyage à l'intérieur du Parti Communiste* (Seuil, 1974), p. 198.

16 Cf. above, p. 202.

17 Cf. above, p. 214.

18 P. J. Truffaut, in *Ouest-France*, 22 March 1978.

19 Thierry Pfister, in *Le Monde*, 22 March 1978.

20 Olivier Duhamel, in *Ouest-France*, 21 March 1978.

21 Althusser's articles are available in English, in *New Left Review* (May–June 1978).

22 Cf. *op. cit.*, pp. 186–90.

23 C. Willard, *ibid.*, p. 190.

24 A separate chapter has been devoted to the relations between the PCF and the international Communist movement from 1947 to 1984, because it was felt that this would help to see this important issue in perspective.

CHAPTER 8

Coming of age: from Cominform to 'Euro-Communism' and beyond (1947–84)

We shall examine the PCF's relations with the international Communist movement under three headings, the Cominform, the CPSU 20th Congress and its sequels, and the rise and fortunes of 'Eurocommunism'.

The Cominform (1947–56)

The Cominform (Communist Information Bureau), which was set up in 1947, was a typically cold-war product. It was communism's answer to the Truman Doctrine. Officially it was not a new Comintern but an organisation of nine parties (the seven European CPs which were in power, plus the PCF and the PCI) for the purpose of 'exchanging views and information', but in practice it laid down the line for all CPs, and its pronouncements were authoritative. For behind the Cominform there was Comrade Stalin, the Great, the Wise. The first meeting (September 1947) was mostly devoted to a report from Zhdanov, in which the CPSU leader divided the world into two hostile camps, headed respectively by the USA and the USSR. He called on the Communist parties in 'capitalist countries' to take the lead in defending national independence, peace and democracy. In the course of the discussion that followed, the PCF and the PCI were strongly criticised by the Yugoslavs, Kardelj and Djilas, and were charged with many crimes, including that of not having sufficiently exploited the post-war situation and that of having allowed themselves to be ousted from the government. Duclos, who represented the PCF together with Fajon, admitted some mistakes, but he denied that his party had lacked vigilance. Zhdanov and Malenkov complained that his 'self-criticism' had not gone far enough and they took him to task for having called the PCF 'a party of government'. He replied that all he had meant was that the PCF was



worthy and able to govern. The Zhdanov line about 'the two camps' subsequently became that of all CPs, and the PCF in particular became increasingly anti-USA and anti-government.[1]

The only other claim to 'fame' for which the Cominform is remembered is its 1948 condemnation of Tito because of his 'nationalistic deviation', i.e. his independence in relation to the USSR. Other crimes included putting the peasantry before the working class, and the National Front before the Communist party. Moreover, in one of their letters to Tito and Kardelj, Stalin and Molotov told them that they 'lacked modesty' because they were praising their wartime achievements 'to the skies', forgetting that Yugoslavia had been liberated thanks to Soviet assistance. The letter went on to say that 'in matters of revolution', the PCF and the PCI had 'greater merits' than the Yugoslav CP, and that it was 'a matter of regret that the Soviet Army did not and could not give them this same help' which it had given Yugoslav Communists. Above all, the French and the Italians had 'honestly admitted their errors', unlike the Yugoslav leaders who were persisting in theirs.[2] After the 1947 humiliation, this was sweet revenge for the two western CPs. In 1949 the Cominform went one stage further and called upon the people of Yugoslavia to overthrow the gang of 'traitors' who were ruling them. From then onwards Tito and his colleagues were vilified by all CPs. The PCF was as vocal as others, feeling perhaps that it was getting its own back on its former critics. It is not one of its proudest achievements. Neither was its defence of the rigged trials in eastern Europe which occurred in the 1950s, of which the most famous were those of Rajk in Hungary (1949) and of Slansky in Czechoslovakia (1952). Both were accused of 'spying for foreign powers' and duly executed. Others were either shot or jailed. In his memoirs, Duclos argues that French Communists had acted in good faith and had been deceived by others, who withheld the true facts from them. Ignorance may be a partial excuse, but it is hard to condone the refusal to think for oneself. Incidentally, all the accused have since been posthumously rehabilitated.

In 1955, with Stalin safely out of the way, Khrushchev took a number of initiatives to reduce international tension, and in particular he paid Tito a visit and apologised for the Cominform's interference in Yugoslavia's internal affairs, without actually withdrawing the 1948 political criticisms. The PCF assessed the event as part of the USSR's 'peace offensive', and in *La Nouvelle Critique*, Francis

Cohen wrote that French Communists were glad they were no longer cut off from 'a friendly people', adding that the Belgrade agreement had contributed to international detente. Although Stalin had not been named either by the CPSU or by the PCF, the open rejection of one of his worst acts made everyone sense that there was more to come. A year later, the 20th Congress bombshell exploded, and de-Stalinisation began in the Communist movement.

The CPSU 20th Congress and its sequels (1956–68)

The 20th congress opened on 14 February 1956. For the first nine days it was busy discussing the new ideas contained in Khrushchev's report, especially the assertion that the 'anti-imperialist forces' (the socialist countries, the national-liberation movement and the western workers) had grown stronger; that war was not inevitable; that the 'peaceful co-existence' of countries with different social systems was both possible and necessary; that each country would find its own road to socialism, and that in some of them, a peaceful transition to socialism had become a realistic perspective; that there were new opportunities for Socialist–Communist co-operation, nationally and internationally; and finally, that the CPSU was resolved to restore the principle of 'collective leadership', and the 'norms of socialist legality' which had both been violated in the past owing to what he called 'the cult of the individual'. It was this last point which implied a criticism of Stalin, but only indirectly since he had not been named. However, on 24–25 February, at a closed session which was not attended by any foreign delegates,[3] Khrushchev launched a full-scale attack on Stalin, charging him with having been a tyrant who had sent thousands of innocent people to their deaths. The text of his speech was not released to the press or the public, but it was used by party propagandists – or any rate a summary of it – when they reported back to their branches. As for the foreign delegations they had to make do with hearsay accounts, except that the delegates from the socialist countries, from France and from Italy were given the text of Khrushchev's speech (in Russian) a few hours before it was made and were asked to return it immediately and treat it as top secret. The French delegation (Thorez, Duclos, Cogniot and Pierre Doize) did as requested, and so did all the others. Years later, at the end of 1976, Marchais referred to the incident, saying that it would be up to historians to judge the party's then behaviour, but adding that 'today, after our 22nd congress, it is unthinkable that we should not speak the



truth on any question whatsoever, and publicly'.

On 4 June the American State Department released the text of the secret speech, without Moscow issuing any protest. Publicly, the PCF refused to consider it as authoritative and referred to it as 'the report attributed to Khrushchev', but privately the leadership was disturbed. It despatched Waldeck Rochet, Servin and Fajon to Moscow to discuss the matter. Fajon later told Harris and Sédouy that Khrushchev had not only admitted the existence of his speech, but had actually shown it to his guests. On being asked why, in that case, *L'Humanité* had said nothing about it, he replied: 'Because Khrushchev told us that, officially, the report did not exist'.[4] That the PCF leadership should have accepted what virtually amounted to a CPSU instruction shows the extent to which 'the party of Lenin' could still count on the loyalty of foreign Communists. (All the other CPs kept quiet, including the PCI.) On the other hand, the fact that private explanations had had to be given, at the PCF's request, can be seen as a first sign of independent thinking, albeit very mild.

What mattered more than the 'official' existence of the speech was its content. To all Communists, the revelation of Stalin's crimes came as a great shock, and many felt it as a personal tragedy. Some could not bear the agony, and they left the movement, either noisily or discreetly. Those who remained, once they had got over the shock, wanted to know why it had all happened. One of the most forceful foreign critics was Togliatti, who declared in an interview with *Nuovi Argomenti* (June 1956) that a partial 'degeneration' had taken place under Stalin in the 'different parts of the social organism'. Two days later the PCF Politbureau issued a statement which carefully refrained from following Togliatti's suggestion, but which regretted the secrecy over Khrushchev's speech and demanded a 'deepened Marxist analysis' of 'Stalin's faults, their origin and the conditions in which they came about'. A public PCF statement which criticised a CPSU action and urged Soviet leaders to do something was very mild indeed in comparison with what the party said since, but at the time it was unprecedented. The 'deepened Marxist analysis' of the Stalin era duly came on 30 June, in a lengthy CPSU document. The emergence of Stalinism was explained in terms of objective factors (centralisation due to the hostile 'capitalist encirclement'), of psychological factors (Stalin's arrogance, brutality and morbidly suspicious nature), and of the incorrect Stalinist theory that the class struggle grows sharper as socialism grows stronger. The resolution also attempted to explain the



behaviour of other party leaders by saying that they did take some counter-measures, but that a frontal attack upon Stalin would have been impossible because of his great prestige among the people. Moreover, many facts became known after Stalin's death, 'chiefly in connection with the exposure of Beria's gang and the establishment of party control over the security organs'. The PCF CC hailed the resolution as 'a document of inestimable value for the international working-class movement'. In fact, despite its merits, the CPSU statement was by no means a full Marxist analysis of 'the cult', chiefly because the Soviet leadership was reluctant to let too many skeletons out of the cupboard.

As for the PCF leadership, its initial reaction to the 20th congress was partly one of support and partly one of criticism. The support went to the policies of peaceful co-existence, peaceful transition to socialism, and Socialist–Communist co-operation, not mainly out of loyalty to the CPSU, but above all, because these policies corresponded to the PCF's own belief and practice. In a sense, French Communists felt that they had themselves pioneered the views expressed by Khrushchev on these topics. The criticism concerned what Thorez and Duclos in particular saw as an unbalanced attack on Stalin. Thorez told Ceretti that a 'glorious past' had been 'sullied' by Khrushchev, whilst Duclos complained that the story that during the war Stalin had used a globe rather than detailed maps to direct the Red Army's operations simply did not ring true. The refusal to endorse a wholesale condemnation of Stalin was not confined to private reservations, but it also came out in public statements, such as the one issued by the CC on 22 March, which deplored Stalin's 'violation of socialist legality' but aggressively recalled his 'merits as a theoretician and as a leader'. What the leadership feared was that the whole truth about Stalin might have a demoralising effect on the membership. The feeling among the majority of contemporary Communists is that this fear was unfounded and that the party as a whole would have gained, not lost, if it had thoroughly discarded Stalinism.

But to what extent was the PCF Stalinist? Stalinism is made up of four elements – the 'cult' of the individual leader, dogmatism, bureaucratic curtailment of democracy, and mass terror and repression against dissidents. With regard to the cult of Stalin, the PCF was certainly guilty, because it had come to regard the Soviet leader as the symbol of socialism. The fact that none of the French Communist leaders had had to work closely with him (like Togliatti, for example,



when he was a Comintern official) helped in the process. The PCF idolised Stalin the symbol rather than Stalin the man. It passionately believed in the former and it hardly knew the latter. A second aspect of the 'cult' concerned Thorez, and on occasions the PCF was described as 'the party of Maurice Thorez'. However, unlike the cult of Stalin, the cult of Thorez was based, not on the man's remoteness but on the fact that he was eminently approachable and had a good deal of personal magnetism. The number of those who disliked him was probably smaller than the number of those who felt drawn towards him. All the same, there is no doubt that the frequent eulogies of Thorez were in bad taste.

Dogmatism affected the PCF politically and ideologically. It was because of Stalin's dogmatism that Thorez did not work out an independent French strategy, despite cautious attempts to do so from time to time. It was ideological dogmatism which was responsible for the fact that for years, PCF intellectuals did not discuss other people's views, but merely attacked them. A case in point was Sartre's existentialism, dismissed in 1947 as 'decadent', whilst his novels were described as 'literature for gravediggers'. Before him, André Gide had fared even worse for having dared to find fault with the Soviet Union and had been accused of being a 'renegade'. In spite of this, there were redeeming features. In the political field, the PCF broke new ground with its Popular Front policy, in the teeth of Stalin's initial reluctance. In the cultural field, the 1930s and the 1950s were periods when PCF intellectuals intelligently applied Marxism to their own areas in science, art and literature. People like the biologist Marcel Prenant, the psychologist Henri Wallon, the scientists Langevin and Joliot-Curie, and the poets Aragon and Eluard, were not mere Stalinist hacks.

On the issue of bureaucracy and democracy, there was the deplorable tendency to vilify all dissidents and opponents and a frequent over-emphasis on discipline at the expense of free debate. But this was not due to Stalinism exclusively. The party was semi-legal in the 1920s, completely illegal during the war, and frequently hounded in the 1950s. All this did not make for sober judgement. Moreover, it is a fact that the PCF under Thorez was much more democratic than the CPSU under Stalin. Thorez had started his career by asking people to speak out, and generally he did not discourage criticism provided it was within 'permissible' channels. As for party discipline, it was not imposed from above, but it mostly stemmed from an act of faith: one believed in the Party, and this implied belief in its wisdom and in its



right to demand iron discipline in the battle against 'the class enemy'. Finally, the most sinister aspect of Stalinism, its mass terror against dissidents, could not have been a feature of the PCF's *behaviour*, since it was not in power like the CPSU. The worst that can be said – and it is bad enough – is that French Communists uncritically supported all the purges and all the rigged trials. The main reason was the cult of Stalin, of course, but there was also the experience of the French Revolution. The belief that in 1793 the Terror had been the only way to save the Republic must have given many PCF members an additional reason for thinking that the USSR and the socialist countries were defending themselves against real counter-revolutionaries.

Although de-Stalinisation was at first slow and lukewarm, the 14th party congress, held in July 1956, was the congress which started the process. Both Thorez in his opening speech and Servin in his organisational report defended democratic centralism, but they both implied that the trouble with Stalinism was that it had departed from such a principle by substituting the rule of one man for collective decisions and collective discipline. A few weeks before the congress Thorez had told the CC that 'criticism and self-criticism' were more important than ever, and that one of Stalin's faults was to have taught others the value of this method whilst he flouted it himself. The General Secretary had also gone out of his way to assert that one should not always expect criticism from below to be 'one hundred per cent correct': 'Even if the criticism is only ten per cent correct, one must learn to accept it.' At the congress itself, however, he felt the need to rebuke those who had 'noisily' demanded a thorough overhaul of the party's structure. But he did concede that there were errors to be corrected. It was all rather vague and general, admittedly, but even so, it was a modest start. Moreover, the tone of the 'Appeal to the Socialist comrades' which was issued at the congress was friendly and conciliatory.

The party's attitude towards the intellectuals was another step on the way to de-Stalinisation. After an initial show of impatience in the face of the 'unreasonable demands' made by some party intellectuals, the leadership became more tolerant. As time went on it was with its blessing or tacit approval that a number of Communist scholars started to make an analysis of Stalinism and its roots. One of them was Michel Verret, who wrote an essay embodying the collective views of his colleagues on the editorial board of *La Nouvelle Critique*. With-

out condoning faith in Stalin, he tried to account for it by the temptation to personalise power, a temptation which he said was as old as the state institution, and by the tense international situation, which led to the belief that monolithic unity and loyalty to the Chief were imperative. He also complained that the open hostility of those who 'hated the virtues of socialism as much as its faults'[5] was partly responsible for the Communists' going to the other extreme.

The modern PCF assessment of the party's behaviour in 1956 is generally summed up in the now current phrase, '*le retard de 1956*'. The delay did not merely concern the acknowledgement of Stalin's faults and errors, but first of all the working out of a strategy free from the Stalinist dogma that the Soviet experience constituted a universal 'model'. Such a dogma did not always lead the PCF to neglect the immediate tasks facing Communists in France, but it did prevent it from conducting its propaganda about future socialism on the basis of a concrete analysis of French realities, as we had occasion to notice in previous chapters. In this respect, Marchais's remark at the 1979 23rd congress is significant:

> We drew attention ourselves to the question of the 1956 delay. At that time, our Party did not draw all the necessary lessons from the CPSU 20th Congress. This concerned of course what had happened in the Soviet Union during the Stalin era . . . But some comrades have pointed out that what was also at stake . . . – one might say above all – was the consideration of the original roads, adapted to our conditions, through which the people of France can travel towards socialism.

The first immediate sequel of the 20th congress was the Hungarian crisis in October–November 1956. Popular pressure had compelled the Stalinists, Rakosi and Gerö, to resign. Their successor, Imre Nagy, tried to introduce liberal reforms, but was not able to stem the tide of revolt. As a result, four of his ministers, led by Janos Kadar, argued that popular discontent, although legitimate, had gone too far and was aided and abetted from outside. They further argued that the only way to stop the daily hangings and shootings of hundreds of Communists by angry crowds was to get Soviet troops (already stationed in the country under the peace treaties) to intervene. For its part, the Soviet government was becoming increasingly worried that Hungary might be lost to the 'socialist camp', and on 4 November the Soviet army occupied Budapest, deposed Nagy and replaced him with Kadar. Western public opinion and western governments denounced the intervention as a gross violation of Hungary's sovereignty and



described Kadar as a 'puppet'. Although the leaderships of all Communist parties defended the Soviet action (after heated debates behind closed doors in some cases), a substantial number of rank-and-filers were so appalled that they tore up their party cards. In France a wave of anti-communism followed: PCF members and PCF buildings were attacked by armed gangs, and the party was assailed on all sides, from the right and from the left. For example Sartre, who had become a 'fellow traveller' (his own phrase) in the 1950s, severed all relations with the PCF and said that after having earned the title of *parti des fusillés* during the war, it had become *le parti des fusilleurs*. But the leadership stuck to its guns. It justified the USSR, partly out of traditional solidarity, and partly in the light of its own analyses of the Hungarian situation. It interpreted the reports of western newspaper correspondents about the 'White Terror', the arms and emigrés pouring into Hungary from neighbouring countries such as Austria and the statement of the Catholic Primate, Cardinal Mindszenty, that 'Hungary should abandon communism and return to a system of private property',[6] as proof that there was a real danger of counter-revolution and that the Hungarian working class, demoralised by Rakosi's crimes and by Nagy's 'opportunism', was not strong enough to bar the road to fascism without outside help. As for the involvement of many workers in the revolt, it was not denied, but it was explained as stemming from legitimate grievances, cleverly exploited by the enemies of socialism.

The repercussions of the Hungarian crisis on the PCF's internal life were great. According to Medvedev,[7] Thorez told Khrushchev in 1958 that the party lost half its members because of Hungary. That may have been an exaggeration,[8] but the number of resignations was high. There were also rumblings of discontent among party intellectuals. Four Communist writers (Claude Roy, Roger Vailland, Claude Morgan and J. F. Rolland) appended their signatures to an Open Letter to the Soviet government, which had the support of such non-Communists as Sartre and Vercors. (Rolland and Roy were expelled, whilst Vailland and Morgan left of their own accord.) The four rebels were followed by ten PCF intellectuals, among whom were Picasso and Wallon, who, in more moderate language, spoke of the *malaise* inside the party. In the ensuing weeks and months the PCF press tried to answer both external and internal critics. In *La Nouvelle Critique* of December 1956, Verret addressed himself to Sartre, using a firm but courteous tone. He complained that the

philosopher had swallowed the stories he had read in the 'bourgeois press', that same press which was 'telling lies' about the 'Suez adventure', and he denied that the PCF had split the French left, saying that it had never made acceptance of its Hungarian line a precondition for left unity.

An even more serious sequel than Hungary was the Sino–Soviet dispute, which erupted in 1961 and became sharper as time went on. After having initially supported the 20th Congress line, the Chinese CP began to deplore the CPSU's excessive denigration of Stalin, and especially, to criticise its views on peaceful co-existence and peaceful transition to socialism, which were described as 'revisionist'. In 1962 Khrushchev was accused of 'cowardice' by Peking because he had removed Soviet missiles from Cuba in return for Kennedy's pledge that the USA would not invade the island. Mao coined the phrase that 'imperialists are paper tigers', to which Khrushchev replied that the tigers had nuclear teeth. Whilst continuing to proclaim its attachment to peaceful co-existence, the CPC declared that war was practically inevitable so long as 'imperialism' existed. By 1963 it had become obvious that the two Communist giants were at loggerheads, all the more so since there had been armed clashes between them over frontier adjustments. This came as an unpleasant shock to all Communists who had always asserted that unlike capitalist states, socialist countries could live in harmony since their economies, freed from the profit motive, did not lead them to pursue 'expansionist aims'. But the ugly facts were there. Marxists had to admit that socialism *may* remove the chief cause of national antagonisms, but that the process was neither automatic nor immediate, and that it was time to remember that Marx himself had warned that the new society arising after the destruction of capitalism would be 'stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it emerges' (*Critique of the Gotha Programme*, 1875). What had started as a Sino–Soviet dispute became a major split in the international Communist movement, with a majority of CPs, including nearly all the western ones, being on the CPSU's side, and a substantial minority on the CPC's. Moreover, Maoist groups were formed in many countries in opposition to the existing CPs. These groups are still alive at the time of writing, but so far they have failed to attract more than a handful of followers in the west.

In addition to the CPSU, the two parties which were most violently attacked by Peking for their alleged 'revisionism' were the PCI and



the PCF. Both of them spiritedly defended their views. According to Lily Marcou, the content of the PCF leaders' refutation of Maoist policies was sound, but 'the unconditionality which they displayed and their way of mechanically and automatically copying the CPSU'[9] somewhat justified the Chinese charge that their 'sudden reversal' was orchestrated from Moscow. There is no doubt that the PCF's case against the CPC was weakened by its almost servile alignment with the CPSU, but this concerned general issues only and not the various aspects of PCF history and policy (e.g. the party's allegedly lukewarm support for the Vietnamese nationalists) which were also part of the argument between the two sides. Moreover, the Chinese charge of 'sudden reversal' was unfounded with regard to the main issues involved in the debate, for although the PCF's stand was new, it represented, as we have seen, the climax of the party's own thinking over the years.

It was mostly about foreign policy, revolutionary strategy and left unity that the PCF and the CPC were in sharpest disagreement. On foreign policy, the French (and Soviet) case was that socialism now exerts a 'decisive influence' on world events and is able to check 'the normal laws of imperialism', in particular its drive to war. An October 1963 editorial in the *Cahiers du communisme* declared that 'the nature of imperialism has not changed, but only *its possibilities and its power*'. The same article criticised China for refusing to sign the partial nuclear test-ban treaty, remarking that de Gaulle's France had been the only other major power to take a similar stand. On revolutionary strategy, the article asserted that the perspective of the peaceful transition to socialism did not imply 'illusions . . . about the *nature* of capitalism', but the building of a popular alliance, broad and strong enough to make capitalist forcible resistance to social change virtually impossible. With regard to the Chinese view that the main revolutionary struggle was now between the poor countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, the so-called 'storm centres of the revolution', and the rich industrialised countries (including the USSR), the PCF declared that it was un-Marxist and that it drove a wedge between the national-liberation movement, on the one hand and the socialist countries and the international working-class movement on the other. Finally, French Communists repudiated the Chinese charge that co-operation with the Socialists smacked of reformism. They said that it was the only way to defeat de Gaulle's *pouvoir personnel* in the immediate present and to ensure majority support for socialism in the

future. Although the PCF remains strongly anti-Maoist on these issues to this day, one may note that when Mao died in 1976 the party's message of condolence to the CPC declared that 'we only want to remember his wonderful role, our common struggles, our solidarity'.

The final, belated sequel of the 20th Congress was the 1968 Czech crisis. Czechoslovakia was the last east European country to get rid of its Stalinist leadership. When it did so in January 1968 by removing Novotny, and when the CPCz adopted a democratic 'Action Programme' in April, the country began to embark upon a much-delayed process of liberalisation. As in the case of Hungary, right-wingers tried to benefit from the situation, but unlike the Hungarian Communists the Czech CP remained firmly in control. In spite of this, the Soviet leaders were uneasy about 'unorthodox' experiments and they sounded the alarm, warning that there was a danger of 'peaceful counter-revolution'. At the beginning of August it looked as if the differences had been overcome, because the Czechs and five other Warsaw Pact countries (the USSR, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria and the GDR) signed a Declaration at Bratislava which pledged respect for one another's independence and co-operation for common aims. But on 21 September, the Warsaw Pact troops, led by the Soviet Union, entered Czechoslovakia on the pretext that they had been invited by un-named Czech Communists to help smash the imminent counter-revolution. In fact, no such invitation had been issued, and there was no sign of an impending counter-revolutionary coup. However, the troops did not leave. This time, the solidarity of all Communist parties was lacking, and most of the western CPs issued strong protests. The PCF, which had tried unsuccessfully to mediate between Moscow and Prague (in July Waldeck Rochet travelled to both capitals), immediately expressed 'its surprise and reprobation', in a Politbureau statement issued on the very evening of the intervention and unanimously endorsed by the CC the day after. The CC further declared that it was up to the Czech Communists and people 'to safeguard and develop socialism in their country'. Never before had French Communists so openly criticised the Soviet Union, and Waldeck Rochet, in a radio interview, admitted that it had been done with 'bitterness and some heart-rending'. He asserted, however, that the PCF had not become 'anti-Soviet'. On the 27th, a Soviet–Czech agreement was signed in Moscow. The PCF claimed to accept at face value the undertaking by both parties 'to implement the Bratislava principles', but it did not mention the fact that the Czech leaders had



been forced to 'negotiate' under duress. Neither did the party renew its demand that the troops should be withdrawn. It looks as if, surprised by its own boldness, it did not wish to go away further. Did it also hope that by refraining from outspoken criticism it might prevail upon the Soviet leaders to soften their position? If so, that hope was certainly not justified by subsequent events, for the so-called 'normalisation' led to the removal of Dubcek, considered too 'soft' and unreliable, and to his replacement by Husak at the head of the party.

Understandably, the Czech crisis greatly shook the PCF membership, not only because, as in Hungary, force had been used by a great socialist power but because on that occasion it had clearly not been necessary, and the party had said so. Most French Communists shared their leaders' 'bitterness' and supported their action, but some felt they had gone too far, and others that they had not gone far enough. Thorez's widow, Jeannette Vermeersch, was among the former, and Garaudy among the latter. The first eventually resigned from her leading position, and the second was rebuked for having publicly called on the Soviet leaders to 'get out'. As for the rest of the leadership, it gradually gave up its moderate stand and became increasingly critical of developments in Czechoslovakia. In July 1972 the Politbureau came out against the trial of Czech dissidents, and in 1977 it condemned the harassment of the 'Charter 77' supporters, saying that 'the use of such methods irresistibly recalls the arbitrariness of a tragic past'.

'Euro-communism' and beyond (1968–84)

The PCF's first show of independence in relation to Moscow was the 'surprise and reprobation' it expressed when Czechoslovakia was  invaded by its Warsaw Pact allies. Two further signs that followed were the party's revised stand on international Communist conferences and its new approach to the socialist countries. The dissolution of the Comintern in 1943 and of the Cominform in 1956 had left a void in the movement, and the post-Stalin era witnessed the attempt to revive international unity in a new guise, by the holding of international Communist conferences whose decisions would be morally binding on all CPs although they could not be constitutionally enforceable. The attempt came mainly from the CPSU, but it met with stiff opposition and had eventually to be given up. The first critic was Togliatti, who suggested that what was needed was 'unity in diversity'



and 'polycentrism'. This last term was unfortunate because it gave rise to different interpretations. According to the Italians, all it meant was the decentralisation of the Communist movement, but others, especially the PCF, insisted that, literally, it amounted to the creation of many centres.

The first world conference of CPs was held in Moscow in November 1960 and was attended by 81 parties (out of a total of 87), with the Yugoslavs being the most notable absentees. After many behind-the-scene discussions, a long document was unanimously adopted, which pledged the movement to peaceful co-existence, peaceful transition to socialism where practicable, solidarity with national-liberation movements, and respect for each Communist party's autonomy. According to Robrieux, Thorez sided with Khrushchev at that meeting, in order to exploit the Sino–Soviet dispute (very much in evidence during the conference private sessions) and to achieve a PCF *conditional* support for the CPSU, '*pour opérer un ralliement conditionnel*'.[10] That may have been the case, but whatever 'conditions' the French leader may have put forward, his contributions were unmistakably pro-Soviet. He ridiculed Mao's thesis that 'imperialists should be despised strategically but taken seriously tactically' and called it 'confused reasoning'. He further asserted that the unity of the world Communist movement rested on acknowledging the CPSU's 'vanguard role'.

The CPSU 22nd congress, held in October 1961, was in a sense a 'mini' world conference because many CPs had sent their top leaders as delegates, with the exception of the Albanians who had declined the invitation to attend. They were attacked by Khrushchev from the congress rostrum, and through them everybody knew that it was the CPC which was being criticised for its 'dogmatism' and for clinging to 'the cult of the individual'. In fact, the Chinese delegate, Chou-en-Lai, publicly rebuked the Soviet leader, left the congress, and went to the Lenin–Stalin mausoleum to lay a wreath on Lenin's tomb and another one on Stalin's. Khrushchev's immediate retaliation was to order the removal of Stalin's body from the mausoleum, a gesture which Lily Marcou describes as 'grotesque and macabre'.[11] The PCF supported the CPSU throughout. During the two years that followed, China and Albania loudly demanded another world conference so that they could defend themselves before all 'brother parties', but until 1963 the CPSU, supported by the PCF, showed great reluctance towards the idea, arguing that an international meeting had to

be 'carefully prepared'. However, in the autumn of 1963 the roles were reversed because the Soviet leaders now felt confident that they could isolate China. A clear sign that times had changed was that despite the support of old faithfuls such as the PCF, many CPs, although opposed to Chinese policies, felt that the Soviet proposal smacked of 'excommunication'. It was then that the PCF gradually started to shift its ground. Whilst still supporting the holding of a world conference, it differed from the CPSU in demanding 'a more limited agenda' rather than the discussion of all contentious issues. The climax was reached in February 1968 (before the crisis in Czechoslovakia) at a 'preliminary consultative meeting' of sixty-seven CPs, when Marchais declared that the unity of the movement could not be achieved by 'proclamations, but [required] tenacious, innovatory efforts'. It was the PCF's views which prevailed in the end, not the CPSU's.

The second – and to date, last – world conference was held in June 1969, and there was only one item on the agenda, 'the struggle against imperialism'. It was attended by seventy-five parties, with China, Albania and again Yugoslavia being among the absentees. The final document, which five parties refused to sign, and some signed only in part, declared that there was no 'world centre' and that each Communist party decided its own policies independently. Moreover, it openly admitted the existence of differences among Communists, stating that they should be overcome by debate and should not preclude unity against imperialism. Finally, the 1969 conference was the first one at which the non-Communist press was present, and Marchais, in his report to the PCF CC, was able to boast that 'never was a conference of Communist Parties less "secret".' Lily Marcou speaks of a 'policy of transparence'[12] and points out that for the first time the Soviet public were informed of other Communist parties' views through the full conference reports which appeared in their press.

Despite the obvious Soviet wish to hold further international conferences, only bilateral and regional meetings took place after 1969. Among the latter, the most significant were the 1972 conference on Vietnam, attended by twenty-seven European parties, including the Yugoslavs for the first time since 1948, and the 1976 Berlin conference, attended by twenty-nine European parties, again with Yugoslavia's participation. At that last conference Brezhnev graciously conceded that 'every party contributes to the development of



revolutionary theory' and argued that differences should be settled by 'comradely discussion'. But the very principle of the validity of international conferences was challenged by Marchais, supported by most western CPs, when he demanded 'more flexible gatherings' which 'would not necessarily be concluded with the adoption of a document'. One such 'flexible gathering' was the April 1980 Paris conference, sponsored by the French and Polish Communists, which ended, not with a document, but with an 'Appeal to the peoples of the world', urging them to support and fight for all moves towards disarmament and detente. Twenty-two parties attended the meeting, but a number of them declined, among them the PCI, the CPGB, and the Spanish CP. According to non-Communist critics in the west, the real aim of the conference was to prevent the isolation of the USSR in the Communist movement after its military intervention in Afghanistan. This, they say, accounts for the PCI's refusal to attend and for the PCF's willingness to act as one of the sponsors. As for PCF comments, they dealt mostly with the ostensible purpose of the conference – peace – and with what was regarded as its success – the mere fact that it was held at all. As for the absence of some parties, it was not fiercely attacked, but merely regretted, and Marchais wrote in his 1980 book, *L'Espoir au présent*: 'This initiative has appealed to a great number of parties, which is good. Some chose not to come, which is their own business, and should not be over-dramatised.'

With regard to the PCF's new approach to the socialist countries, the most significant landmarks were the 22nd congress (1976), the publication of *L'URSS et nous* (1978), and the 23rd congress (1979). Before public criticism of the Soviet Union was voiced at the 1976 congress, a number of minor incidents had laid the ground, e.g. Aragon's 1966 article in *L'Humanité*, criticising the sentencing of the dissidents, Daniel and Siniavsky, and saying that it was 'more harmful to the interests of socialism than the works of Daniel and Siniavsky could have been'; the 1970 editorial, again in *L'Humanité*, deploring that two Jews had been sentenced to death in Leningrad for having hijacked a plane, and saying that 'the extreme harshness of the verdict seems out of all proportion to the facts'; and the 1975 Politbureau statement following the showing of a TV documentary on Soviet labour camps, which said that 'if reality corresponded with the pictures shown . . . [the PCF] would express its deep surprise and its most formal reprobation'. 'Surprise and reprobation' again, but this time, the first one was 'deep' and the second one 'most formal'.





In his opening speech to the 22nd congress Marchais devoted special attention to the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. After recalling the community of objectives and doctrine between them and the PCF, he went on to say that it was the existence of that community of aims and outlook which entitled French Communists to criticise what they thought was wrong, especially the 'repressive measures' against dissidents. Such measures, he asserted, were alien to socialism and tarnished its image. At the same congress Henri Malberg, a CC member, replied to the argument that the PCF's criticisms might play into the hands of the bourgeoisie and said:

> What the bourgeoisie uses against socialism is not our party's responsible language, but, alas, the facts which provoke it. . . . One can defeat false ideas with correct ideas, without resorting to the kind of repression which, when it occurs in a socialist country, deeply hurts us as Communists. We do not think that socialism needs that. Very much the reverse; it has better things to do. And it does things so much better in so many fields.

The debate about the socialist countries was given a fresh impetus by the publication, in the summer of 1978, of a controversial book, *L'URSS et nous*, written by five PCF academics (one of whom has since left) who had expert knowledge of the Soviet Union. On the day the book came out the Politbureau described it as a creative contribution which was destined 'to remodel the very method of studying and considering the Soviet Union'. The Introduction, written by Francis Cohen, sets the tone by mentioning the *contradictions* of a socialist society. Although Marxists are familiar with the concept of contradiction, they had tended to forget its real meaning, largely under Stalin's influence, for whom dialectics was essentially the conflict between the old (necessarily bad) and the new (necessarily good). This moralistic view tended to encourage the idea that contradictions are the scourge of class societies and will somehow make way for 'harmonious relations' under socialism and communism. That was not Marx's view. To him, the aim of the revolution was not to do away with contradictions altogether, which would spell the end of life, but to lay the social basis upon which 'the irreconcilable contradictions of capitalism' cannot arise and to build a society in which contradictions can be overcome fairly swiftly and painlessly. The Introduction also criticises the PCF for its delayed de-Stalinisation and Thorez for not having told the whole truth at the time of the 20th congress.

The Introduction is followed by six chapters and a Conclusion. The first chapter, written by Cohen, is a historical outline which shows the



specific contradiction which dominated each period of the country's development since 1917. The second chapter, written by Adler and Cohen, is about Stalin. Adler recalls the extent of the repression, saying that ten million people perished unnecessarily, and Cohen suggests that the cult of Stalin rested on the cult of the Party, which may help to explain why some staunch revolutionaries made incredible confessions of guilt in 1936–8, thinking that in this way they were helping the Party. The third chapter, written by Cohen, Décaillot and Robel, is about social structure. After examining the three main social categories in Soviet society – the working class, the peasantry and the intelligentsia – it discusses the view that there is a 'new class', made up of state and party officials. The authors admit that these enjoy a few privileges, such as special shops, better housing and the like, but claim that these 'perks' do not amount to the existence of a privileged stratum, still less of a class, for nobody 'owns the USSR as one owns big capitalist combines'. Moreover, no Soviet manager can invest his capital and thus increase his wealth without working. In this sense, the authors say, exploitation (living off other people's labour) has been abolished. However, alienation remains, mainly because decisions regarding public expenditure are not taken democratically enough. The fourth chapter, written by Décaillot, is about the economy. It makes the point that socialist advance has benefited from the workers' full involvement and has suffered whenever it was lacking or played down. The fifth chapter, which is a record of a 'round table' discussion among the authors, is about political life. Many issues are tackled, among which the tendency in the Soviet Union to negate the value of contradictions, as if the revolution can 'stop the march of history'. The sixth chapter, written by Frioux and Robel, is about culture and ideology. Frioux deals with the contradiction between the cultural revolution and the trend towards the imposition of ideological criteria on art and literature. Robel suggests that Stalinist dogmatism was followed by Khrushchev's cautious, partial liberalism, and that the present period is one of 'extreme complexity', of which the most disturbing aspect is the trend towards a 'technocratic ideology'. Finally, the Conclusion, written by Cohen, faces up to a number of 'awkward' questions, especially whether the Soviet Union is really a socialist country. The author refuses categorical Yes or No answers, and suggests that, first, the basis for socialism exists because the means of production no longer belong to individual capitalists, and secondly, that socialism is not a fixed stage, and that the USSR is



slowly moving 'towards more and more socialism'.

Since 1978 there has been a marked shift of emphasis, of which the clearest expression was the assessment given by the 23rd congress (1979) about the socialist countries' 'globally positive balance-sheet'. However, the congress did not go back on its criticism of what the party still calls 'the limitations on democracy' in the Soviet Union and other east-European countries. In 1980, alone of all 'Eurocommunist' parties, the PCF supported the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan on the ground that the Afghan people had the right to ask for Soviet assistance in the task of putting down counter-revolutionaries who were themselves helped by foreign imperialists. On 22 January, when Marchais was asked on TV why Italian and Spanish Communists had not taken the same stand, he replied: 'Is my name Berlinguer or Carillo? The PCF lays down its line independently, without consulting Brezhnev, Berlinguer or Carillo.' The party claimed that it had not given up its traditional stand on the right to self-determination, but that it was 'the imperialists' who were threatening the right of the Afghan people to go ahead with their 'democratic, anti-feudalist revolution'. 'Revolution is not for export; neither is counter-revolution', was how Marchais summed up the PCF position.

It was at the same time that the General Secretary went to meet Brezhnev in Moscow. A joint communique was issued, stating that the two parties would co-operate for common aims despite their differences. Non-Communist opinion interpreted the event as a return to the PCF's alignment with Moscow and as an endorsement of the USSR's action in Afghanistan. But Marchais himself had a different interpretation. First, he dismissed as a 'coincidence' the fact that the joint meeting had taken place at the same time as Soviet troops had entered Afghanistan and said he had not gone to Moscow to discuss the Afghan issue. Secondly, he made much of the fact that the communique referred to the existence of differences between the two parties and he said it was quite an achievement to have got the CPSU to acknowledge this fact publicly. One must admit that it was indeed a novelty. At the end of January, Marchais told Radio Luxembourg that if he had been in Moscow at the time of Sakharov's banishment to Gorky, he would have 'expressed [his] opposition to it'. 'There would have been no joint communique', he added, for he 'would have flown back to Paris the following day'.

In the summer of 1980 the socio-political unrest in Poland raised



once again the related issues of 'socialist democracy' and of the Soviet attitude towards it in relation to other east European countries. The PCF's first statement on the situation was made by Marchais when he spoke at the *Fête de l'Humanité* in September and said that it was up to the Polish people, the Polish government and the Polish Communists 'to overcome the difficulties and to contribute to the strengthening of socialist Poland'. Subsequently the PCF press developed three main themes – support for the Poles in their efforts to 'democratise' the country, support for the independence of trade unions, and denunciation of the 'hypocrisy' of the western governments and media which backed militant unionists in Poland whilst condemning them in France. With regard to the possibility of Soviet intervention, the PCF described it as 'unthinkable', a word which seems to mean both that it is not likely to happen and that French Communists reject it as a viable solution.

Finally, a few words about 'Euro-communism'. As has already been pointed out,[13] the phrase was coined by the western media in the 1970s. It is far from being an accurate label because non-European parties, such as the Japanese, may be said to have endorsed its key concepts, whilst some western CPs, such as the Portuguese, have rejected them. As far as the PCF is concerned, it never liked the phrase, and it even stated that it contradicted the party's belief that there are no 'models' of socialism, either universal or regional. Initially, however, it did not protest too vigorously against its use, for it was anxious to show that, like other western Communist parties, it had broken the 'umbilical cord' which had tied it to Moscow. Bilateral meetings between the PCF and other 'Euro-communist' parties (Italian, Spanish, Japanese and British) took place, of which the most famous were those which were held between the PCF and the PCI, the two largest Communist parties in western Europe. It was no secret that ever since 1956, the rift between the two parties had grown wider and wider. Their rapprochement was all the more spectacular, especially when Enrico Berlinguer and Marchais jointly addressed a huge public meeting in Paris in 1976. After 1978, a definite cooling-off took place, as the two parties' assessments of the socialist countries, of social-democracy and of the struggle against 'imperialism' were substantially different in their emphases and, to some extent, in their actual content. As for the phrase 'Euro-communism', it has practically disappeared from the PCF vocabulary. On the rare occasions when it is used, it is generally to welcome the democratic ingredient of

the concept, on the one hand, but to protest against the restrictive character of the label, on the other. For example, in his 1980 book *L'espoir au présent* Marchais complained that Euro-communists had not paid sufficient attention to the instructive experiences of such CPs as the Portuguese, Greek, Latin American and middle eastern CPs, and of other revolutionary forces in the three continents outside Europe. He demanded 'a little humility' from the west European left and advocated 'a new garment' for Euro-communism, which amounted in fact to its replacement by what he called 'a new internationalism'.[14] Two years later, at the 24th congress, he again demanded a new form of 'international solidarity' with *all* Communist parties and anti-imperialist forces.[15] The Resolution adopted at the congress made the same point and stated that Euro-communism was 'a debatable expression, because it was too narrow'.[16]

Notes

1 Cf. above, Ch. 5.
2 Cf. *Correspondence between the CC of the CPY and the CC of the CPSU* (published by the Yugoslav Embassy, London, 1948).
3 The absence of foreign delegates did not cause surprise at the time, because at all Communist congresses there usually is a closed session devoted to the election of leading bodies.
4 E. Fajon, reported in Harris and Sédouy, *op. cit.*, p. 83.
5 Cf. M. Verret, *Remarques sur le culte de la personnalité*, in *La Nouvelle Critique* (December 1963).
6 Cardinal Mindszenty, reported in *Reynolds News*, 4 November 1956.
7 Cf. Z. Medvedev, reported in *Le Monde*, 6 September 1978.
8 Thorez may have exaggerated in order to strengthen his case against the further de-Stalinisation moves contemplated by Khrushchev.
9 Lily Marcou, *L'Internationale après Staline* (Grasset, 1979), p. 170.
10 P. Robrieux, *op. cit.*, p. 555.
11 Lily Marcou, *op. cit.*, p. 135.
12 *Ibid.*, p. 257.
13 Cf. Introduction, p. 10.
14 *Op. cit.*, pp. 140–1.
15 Cf. *Cahiers du Communisme* (February–March 1983), pp. 71–2.
16 *Ibid.*, p. 377.

CHAPTER 9

Coming of age: from Communist opposition to Communist ministers (1979–84)

Fauvet observes that, 'although fashionable, "snapshot history" is full of gaps and hazards'.[1] The 1979–84 period is indeed too recent to allow one to stand back and assess it in perspective. On the other hand it is packed full with crucial events which it would be a pity not to relate, even if their analysis is bound to be partial and provisional. We shall examine in turn the 23rd congress and its sequels, the 1981 elections, the 24th congress, and the first three years of joint PS–PCF government participation.

The 23rd congress and its sequels (1979–81)

The 23rd congress claimed that it continued the previous one and merely applied its strategy to new conditions. The chief novelties were the assertions that left unity, described as 'irreversible', must begin with unity at grass roots level as the necessary prelude to 'unity at the top'; that the notion of separate stages leading to a final 'break' must make way for the view that social change is a continuous process – hence the replacement of 'advanced democracy', which implies a fixed stage, by 'democratic advance'; that this democratic advance will not be achieved 'through a *Grand Soir* [a big social upheaval], be it an electoral *Grand Soir*', but through a series of step-by-step stubborn struggles, 'whose form and pace cannot be programmed straight off nor dictated from above'; that the PCF's goal is 'self-management socialism' (*le socialisme autogestionnaire*), i.e. the people's own activity to achieve change and their direct control over the means of production once these have become public property; and that all these aims require 'a great mass party, a party of struggle and of government', which is the Communist Party. Further illustrations of the new course included the general title of the congress resolution, 'The future begins now', and the adoption of a new party constitution and rules.



The stress on *autogestion* was probably one of the most striking changes. Before 1977, the PCF had little time for the concept, when it did not in fact treat it with scorn as in May 1968. Its significance was that it represented the rejection of bureaucratic or 'state socialism' (and as such was an implied criticism of the Soviet 'model', where bureaucratic tendencies still prevail) and a call to increased popular activity. The last point helps to understand the 23rd congress conception of unity. It was one which claimed to take into account the positive aspects of the Common Programme – its advanced social content – as well as its 'demobilising effects' – the fact that it fostered the illusion that the signing of a government programme by the left-wing parties was in itself a supreme victory which relegated mass struggles to a minor role. The 23rd congress stressed that unity must begin in action over a multitude of limited objectives, that it was action that led, not to *one* agreement 'at the top' but to a number of agreements, each one the result of popular struggles and a stimulus for further struggles, and that this was not a second best, a *pis aller* after the failure of the Common Programme, but the only way to build a more solid, more lasting unity. Moreover, the congress took the view that unity among different social groups required the gradual overcoming of the obstacles constituted by divergent interests. In his opening speech Marchais declared: 'It is in the struggle taking place below that these obstacles will be overcome, that the convergence of interests will manifest itself.'

An article in the 24 October 1980 issue of *Révolution* spoke of another novelty. The author, Jean-Michel Catala, argued that for a long time the PCF's conception of left unity had been at bottom, 'frontist'. In the Communist vocabulary 'frontism' is the policy whereby the CP builds a front of struggle with other forces, such as the United Front, the Popular Front and the like, in order to achieve immediate objectives (such as barring the road to fascism in the 1930s), whilst retaining its ultimate goal of socialist revolution under Communist leadership. In other words, there was no link between the alliances of the present and the building of socialism in the future. The 23rd congress, according to Catala, broke new ground. It did not suggest a return to the sectarian past of United Front from below only, nor a return to the outmoded *forms* of unity which were valid at the time of the Popular Front. What it offered was a new policy altogether.

The new party constitution adopted at the congress began with a



preamble which omitted any reference to 'the dictatorship of the proletariat', as recommended by the 22nd congress, and asserted instead that 'the road to socialism adopted by the PCF is peaceful, democratic, dependent on the majority's will [*majoritaire*] and pluralistic'. In the preamble, the party's theory was no longer described as 'Marxism–Leninism', but as 'scientific socialism', in order to show that it was not a set of truths to be found in the classics but that it was constantly being enriched. Three alterations to the rules themselves stood out. The first one concerned conditions of membership. One of these had always been, as advocated by Lenin, that a Communist must work in a party unit. The 1979 formulation said that a Communist 'must belong to a cell' (article 1) which helps him/her to take part in the party's activity (article 2). The first article also declared that acceptance of philosophic materialism was not a condition of membership. That had always been the case, though at times in theory only, but it had never been enshrined in the party constitution. The second change concerned internal discussion, which had been a bone of contention between the leadership and the *contestataires* in 1978. In addition to the 'obligatory' pre-congress discussion, there would now be discussion in the columns of the party press whenever the CC launched an internal debate on an important political issue. Finally, there was a special emphasis on 'workplace cells'. After saying that the cell was the basic party unit and listing three different kinds of cell – workplace, residential and rural – the rules added that 'as a revolutionary party, the PCF is organised primarily in workplace cells, the decisive field of class struggle and political battles'. The leading bodies elected at the congress included a greater number of women (eight new ones on the CC) and of intellectuals (nine new ones). The former director of *La Nouvelle Critique*, François Hincker, was not re-elected to the CC.



Shortly after the 23rd congress, the elections to the European assembly were held. The PCF lists received 20.6 per cent of the votes cast; the PS–MRG joint lists, 23.7 per cent; those of the UDF, 27.4 per cent; and the RPR's, 16.1 per cent. 38.8 per cent of the electorate abstained and 3.3 per cent returned a blank ballot paper. The PCF campaign was waged around the issue of national independence, which, as interpreted by the party, required opposition to the EEC's extension to Spain, Portugal and Greece (which would have bad effects on French agriculture and industry, it was claimed), opposition to all plans 'worked out in the secrecy of Brussels cabinets' which



involved the curtailment of French industries, e.g. the Davignon Plan for steel, and opposition to extending the powers of the European parliament at the expense of national parliaments. The Politbureau considered that it had been an achievement for the party to have maintained its electoral position by campaigning alone on such issues. It also chose to interpret the high number of abstentions as a sign of opposition to the EEC, ignoring the fact that many of them stemmed from sheer indifference. With regard to the PS and the MRG, the Politbureau merely complained about their anti-Communist 'aggressiveness', but made no analysis of the PCF's failure to detach voters from them, despite an intensive campaign against the Socialists' 'shift to the right'.

As the 23rd congress had set itself the task of combating 'all illusions', one of its immediate consequences was that the PCF chose to swim against the tide. Non-Communists saw this as a sign that the party was hardening its position in the aftermath of the 1978 electoral defeat and the death of the Common Programme, but the PCF leadership insisted that the Communist solutions were the only ones which could get France out of the crisis, and that even if the majority of French people were not yet aware of this, it was the duty of 'genuine patriots' to put them forward. The leadership also denied that the PCF was living in a self-imposed ghetto, arguing that it was temporarily isolated because its stress on the need for the people to do the fighting themselves was bound initially to have less appeal than the more comfortable 'Leave it to us' approach of other politicians. Be that as it may, the post-23rd congress period was one during which the PCF went out of its way to emphasise its distinctive identity as a revolutionary party. It reasserted its bonds of solidarity with revolutionaries the world over, especially those who were in power, and it drew a sharp contrast, day after day, between itself and the 'reformist' PS, claiming that social-democrats were in favour of 'austerity for the workers' and 'profits for the bosses'. The Socialists retaliated by saying that the PCF had gone back to its 'ingrained Stalinism', that it was indulging in 'crude demagogy', and that its intemperate attacks on its former partners had turned it into an objective ally of the regime. Moreover, the PCF's stand in relation to events in eastern Europe added fuel to the PS fire, all the more so since the PCF was waging a lone battle, first, in defending the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan,[2] and later, in stressing the need for negotiated agreements between the Polish government and the unions, instead of





wholly supporting 'Solidarity', as the PS had done. As we shall see, these foreign policy differences did not disappear when Communists joined the government in 1981 (see below), especially over the issue of martial law in Poland (December 1981).[3]

As the two left-wing parties grew further apart, so did the CGT and the CFDT. The CGT described its rival's moderate policies as alignment with the PS, and the CFDT counter-charged by saying that the CGT wanted to poison the social climate in order to strengthen the PCF. In March 1981 Edmond Maire, the CFDT leader, accused the Communists of being 'totalitarian' and blinded by 'party fanaticism', to which attack the PCF replied with an appeal to all workers to reject such charges as 'aberrant and defamatory', and to demand 'a frank debate' instead of Maire's 'hate campaign'.

Another consequence of the 23rd congress was that the Communists encouraged 'popular intervention' in numerous fields, particularly in the industrial field. They supported the steelworkers' strikes and demonstrations against the Davignon Plan, especially in the north and in Lorraine. They were also active among the Ladrecht miners, who, in spite of the government, tried to get coal out of a mine which had been officially described as one which held nothing but 'pebbles and boulders', and finally broke through the Ladrecht wall and found a pit which contained no less than eight million tons of anthracite. In July 1980 the leader of the PCF Gard *fédération* displayed the Occitan flag in front of the wall, with the following inscription: 'This flag symbolises the region's reconquest of its wealth.' Another significant PCF involvement occurred at Saint-Etienne, where the workers of the multi-purpose firm of Manufrance managed to stop the closure of their workplace with the help of the Communist mayor, Joseph Sanguedolce. In March 1981 after a long industrial, political and legal battle, a workers' co-operative was set up to run Manufrance, the *Société Co-opérative de Production et de Distribution* (SCOPD). On the PCF's behalf, Marchais hailed all these victories and declared: 'No indeed, the employers cannot get the working class to take the path of class collaboration, they cannot force it to agree to its own exploitation.'

Despite its emphasis on 'the poor' and the industrial workers, the PCF made valiant, but only partly successful efforts to rebut the charge that it had gone 'workerist'. In particular, it tried to win over the 'intellectuals', by which term it meant all those who used their mental labour, and not just writers, artists, thinkers and scientists. A



substantial number of these intellectuals, both inside and outside the party, were disturbed by the stress on industrial action, by the attacks on 'the rich' (feeling they were directed at all those who were better off than factory workers), by what they regarded as a toning down of the party's criticism of the socialist countries' limitations on democracy, and by some of the latest cultural attitudes taken by the PCF, which to them signalled a return to past sectarianism. Whether these misgivings were justified or not, they were certainly entertained and voiced, so that the leadership had to tackle them. It did so by convening a *Conseil National* (a consultative body set up by the 23rd congress) at Bobigny in February 1980. The resolution adopted at the meeting began by saying that the present crisis affected intellectuals as much as workers, and it spoke of 'cultural Longwys' by analogy with cities such as Longwy where de-industrialisation had led to stagnation and decline. It then went on to assert that the PCF's fight for 'democratic advance' required the participation of all, and finally it dealt with three issues which were particularly sensitive among intellectuals. The first one was whether the party had given up the aim of left unity, and the answer was that it had done nothing of the sort and that it still wanted unity, including unity 'at the top'. The second one was the socialist countries. The resolution denied that there had been a toning down of criticism of the 'negative phenomena' which existed there, but it also claimed that, despite their serious shortcomings, these countries had abolished exploitation and ended illiteracy 'within the space of a single generation'. The final issue was the workers–intellectuals alliance. The resolution reasserted its paramount importance. On these three crucial issues, except perhaps the last one, the document was too general to be really convincing.

Two areas where the PCF's policy of 'popular involvement' led to heated controversies were immigration and drugs. On immigration, the party's stand was that because France had two million unemployed, further immigration should be stopped, as it would only make unemployment worse. However, Communists did not demand the repatriation of immigrants already in the country, and in fact said they should have the same rights as French workers. On the practical problem of housing, the PCF charged *préfets* and government housing agencies with pursuing the deliberate policy of concentrating immigrants in working-class areas, generally those which had a Communist mayor and council. On 5 November 1980, a Politbureau statement demanded that social assistance to immigrants should come

from the government and the employers, and not only from local councils. The statement expressed its approval of the measures taken by Communist mayors to resist the *préfets*' housing policies and 'to reduce the total value of social assistance to immigrants'. Although the party went out of its way to assert that its proposals were designed to combat racism, it was widely accused of xenophobia, a charge which was unfounded but which its own statements and decisions seemed to justify.[4] Of the various incidents which occurred in relation to immigrants, the most controversial was the 'Vitry incident'. At the end of December 1980, some three hundred Malian workers were transferred from their hostel in the middle-class town of Saint-Maur to a hostel in nearby Vitry, a working-class town run by a Communist mayor, Paul Mercieca. The latter had not been informed, and when he was told what had happened, he tried to talk to the Malian workers and urge them to demand accommodation in Saint-Maur, where most of them worked. The intervention of a Mali embassy official prevented him from seeing the workers, and soon afterwards some Vitry inhabitants, including a few Communists, decided to take the law into their own hands. They used a mechanical digger to destroy the gates leading to the hostel and cut off its water, gas and electricity supply. *L'Humanité*, in its 3 January 1981 issue, described their action as 'deplorable' and insisted that the PCF mayor had had no part in it. It is probable that a number of Vitry demonstrators were racists and did not support their mayor for any nobler motive than short-sighted self-interest, and in view of this, the PCF ought to have been more forceful in its condemnation of their 'regrettable excesses' and in expressing its opposition to mob law.

The PCF's stand on drugs also aroused heated debates. The Communists claimed that their campaign against drugs was aimed at the traffickers, who made money by exploiting other people's weaknesses, and at the regime, which had nothing to offer its youth but unemployment and cynicism. Their opposition to drugs was summed up in the slogan, *La drogue tue, tuons la drogue* (Drugs kill, let us kill drugs). On the practical side, in conformity with the 23rd congress approach, they called upon ordinary people to expose drug pedlars themselves on the ground that the authorities often turned a blind eye and did not prosecute the offenders. This led to a number of incidents, of which the most famous occurred in February 1981, at Montigny, where the PCF mayor, Robert Hue, led a demonstration of local citizens outside the house of a Moroccan who was suspected of



being a drug pedlar. Once again, the party was accused of blatant 'racism' and of favouring mob law. *L'Humanité*'s reply was that a Communist mayor had the right and duty to intervene if nothing was done by the police, all the more so since he had been written to by an Algerian mother who complained that her eldest son had died as a result of taking drugs, and who appealed to him to save her younger son from the clutches of an unscrupulous trafficker, whom she named. The paper's ironic comment was that 'The Communist mayor of Montigny is indeed guilty. . . . Guilty of having answered the call for help which had come from an *immigrant* family. Guilty of preferring victims to traffickers' (13 February 1981). This impassioned defence failed to silence the critics, especially as the party's condemnation of 'regrettable excesses' in the course of 'popular involvement' was too half-hearted to sound fully convincing. It is significant that with regard to both immigration and drugs the party later admitted that its behaviour had been open to criticism. For example, the 24th congress resolution regretted that Communists had tended to act on behalf of 'interested parties' instead of with them (which was an elegant way of saying that they had tried to go it alone), and in March 1983, Marchais confessed that the PCF had raised the issues 'in the wrong way'.

A final consequence of the 23rd congress concerned the party itself and the need to strengthen it in order to make it more effective. At the end of 1980 the membership had grown to 709,000, a figure which



includes 90,700 new recruits, but does not show how many people left.[5] Whilst describing this trend as encouraging, the leadership was anxious to increase the number of factory cells and make them more active. It was only partly successful in both respects. With regard to internal dissidents, it is difficult to estimate their number, since no figures are available at the time of writing, but there is little doubt that they continued to be outspoken, mostly in the Paris area and among intellectuals. For example, in 1979 the former Paris district secretary, Henri Fiszbin, resigned from the CC, and in May 1981, together with François Hincker, he founded *Rencontres Communistes*, a group made up of PCF dissidents and a few others. Fiszbin and Hincker were eventually expelled in October, although the CC's formulation was that they 'had put themselves outside the party' (because they had published their criticisms in the 'bourgeois press' instead of the party press) and that the secretariat had 'duly noted the fact: the founders of *Rencontres Communistes* are no longer members of the Party' (9



October 1981). Another sign of discontent was the creation by Socialist and Communist intellectuals of *Union dans les luttes*, a body which set itself the aim of restoring left unity at the top and did not take up the PCF's view that the PS had 'shifted to the right'. In 1981, two prominent critics were expelled: Elleinstein, who had 'put himself outside the party', and Balibar, who was unceremoniously expelled. It is impossible to know what might have happened to Althusser, because at the end of 1980 he accused himself of having strangled his wife in a fit of nervous depression, and was subsequently detained at the Sainte-Anne infirmary. (The official enquiry ended with a *non-lieu*, i.e. with the conclusion that there were no grounds for prosecution.) However, in November 1980 *Révolution* called him 'a colleague, a friend and a comrade' and described the press attacks on him as the latest example of 'the inexhaustible baseness of anti-Communism'.

The 1981 elections

In October 1980 the PCF National Conference decided to put up a Communist candidate for the April 1981 presidential election, Georges Marchais. It was the first time that the party had taken such a step, since in 1965 and in 1974 it had supported the single candidate of the left, Mitterrand, and in 1969 it had only agreed to let Duclos stand because the Socialists had refused a joint candidate. The decision was therefore a clear sign – and it was presented as such – that the PCF thought it had been wrong in the past to efface itself behind a Socialist and had itself encouraged the view that Communists may be good at building unity but have no further independent role to play once it is achieved, especially as there is no likelihood that a Communist would become president, given the existing political situation in France. But had that situation changed in 1980? The PCF leadership did not think so and it frankly admitted that the object of the exercise was to secure a sufficiently high number of votes in the first ballot to compel a victorious Mitterrand to form a Socialist–Communist coalition and implement far-reaching reforms. The party frequently quoted the saying, *Au premier tour on choisit, au second tour on élimine* (In the first round you choose, in the second round you eliminate), in order to show why a vote for Marchais would not be wasted: it would show which policy people really liked, even if that policy stood little chance of commanding majority support at the second ballot. At that second ballot, the party added, people would then vote for the policy they



disliked least, knowing that the final winner could not ignore their wishes. One should note in passing that the Communists were not the only ones who tried to exploit the two-ballot system in this way, because the Gaullist leader, Chirac, justified his own candidacy on the same grounds as Marchais, i.e. by saying that votes for himself would compel Giscard d'Estaing to take into account the views which Gaullists advocated. The decision to stand a Communist candidate was described by the PCF leadership as an application of the 23rd congress tactic of building unity step by step through a series of battles. The presidential campaign was said to be one, but only one, of these battles in the course of which the party 'mobilised the masses'. Unfortunately for the PCF, a lot of ordinary people who lack the Communists' political sophistication could not understand how standing against a Socialist was a step towards unity, and they concluded that the party had turned its back on unity and wanted to go it alone. Some even thought it was quite right to do so! Such an assessment was inaccurate for the simple reason that Marchais's frequent reminders that there was no 'spare strategy' apart from unity corresponded to the truth: there *was* no other way for French Communists ever to come near to power except through the pluralistic road adopted at the 22nd and 23rd congresses. Whether the tactics used to apply such a strategy were sound and easily understood is another matter.

Another reason put forward by the PCF leadership to account for its decision was that socialism was now on the agenda, not in the sense that it could be achieved overnight but in the sense that there was no way out of the crisis unless structural reforms were implemented with the aim of making decisive inroads into capitalism. Hence the need to show the people that what was at stake in the presidential election was *un choix de société*, a choice for the right kind of society. Significantly, in addition to Marchais, all the other candidates were agreed that the French were called upon to make such a choice. Giscard and Chirac made it quite clear that the society they wanted was present society, perhaps suitably amended, a society based on economic and political liberalism. For his part, Marchais was equally clear about the kind of society he advocated, one in which capitalist profits would be strictly checked as a prelude to their final abolition. The same clarity could not be found in Mitterrand's statements, as he was obviously trying to appeal to middle-of-the-road voters as well as to left-wingers.

Marchais conducted a vigorous campaign. From the start he



described himself as *the* 'anti-Giscard candidate', thus implying that he was against the right and was different from the social-democratic left. He further claimed that a vote for him was a vote for a policy which required more than voting, action. In order to emphasise this point he presented, not a programme but what he called a *Plan de luttes*, in the form of 131 proposals for which people were asked to fight. This Plan included four objectives – full employment, 'a fairer society' (with better wages and conditions and a wealth tax), liberty, and greater opportunities for youth – and three means to achieve them – boosting home industry (*Produire français*), a peaceful foreign policy, and great democratic reforms (nationalisation of key monopolies, decentralisation, capital tax, and democratic planning). Throughout the campaign both Marchais and the party were rather cagey about Communist intentions at the second ballot if the run-off was fought between Giscard and Mitterrand, and Fiterman even declared that the issue 'did not arise'. But it obviously did in the minds of many voters, so that just a month before the election, as Marchais was being interviewed on TV, he finally decided to tackle it. After saying that he would never vote for Giscard and that he would rather not have to abstain, he did not rule out voting for Mitterrand, but added that the only way of warding off the 'danger' of a PS–right coalition was to vote for himself at the first ballot. An unkind commentator paraphrased this as: Vote for Marchais if you want Mitterrand. Actually, it might have been fairer to amend the formulation and say that the Communist message was: Vote for Marchais if you want Mitterrand to be a good president. At one stage during the interview, the PCF leader was asked why his party was willing to govern with the Socialists although they had 'shifted to the right'. He gave a broad smile and exclaimed: 'But to shift them back to the left, of course! Elementary, my dear Watson!' It was a witty repartee, but whether it convinced many viewers that the party was right to attack the Socialists and at the same time repeatedly demand the inclusion of Communist ministers in a left-wing government is not known.

A week before Marchais's TV interview, a report appeared in *Pravda* in which the paper's Paris correspondent found some nice things to say about Giscard's foreign policy, although he reminded his readers that his party, the UDF, was a coalition of 'bourgeois parties'. *Le Quotidien de Paris* carried the headline that 'Brezhnev votes for Giscard', and *Le Monde* asserted on its front page that '*Pravda* draws up a "globally positive balance-sheet" of Giscard d'Estaing's



activity' (14 March 1981). The following day *L'Humanité* denounced what it called *Le Monde*'s 'forgery' on the ground that the phrase 'globally positive balance-sheet' which *Le Monde* had printed in inverted commas could not be found in the *Pravda* article. (*Le Monde* subsequently conceded the point and blamed its Moscow correspondent for this 'regrettable error'.) As for Marchais, he took this opportunity to assert that the views of a Soviet newspaper correspondent were his own affair and in no way represented those of the PCF, which was 'independent of the CPSU in every respect and in every way'.

The hopes of a massive PCF vote were shattered when Marchais got only 15.3 per cent of the poll at the 26 April first ballot. The full results were as follows:

	Votes	*Percentage of votes cast*
Giscard d'Estaing (UDF)	8,222,432	28.31
Mitterrand (PS)	7,505,960	25.84
Chirac (RPR)	5,225,846	17.99
Marchais (PCF)	4,456,922	15.34
Lalonde (Ecologist)	1,126,254	3.87
Arlette Laguiller (Trotskyist)	668,057	2.30
Crépeau (MRG)	642,777	2.21
Debré (Independent Gaullist)	481,821	1.65
Marie-France Garaud (as above)	386,623	1.33
Huguette Bouchardeau (PSU)	321,344	1.10
		Percentage of electorate
Abstentions	6,882,777	18.90
Spoilt ballot papers	478,046	1.31

All observers were surprised by the PCF candidate's poor score, partly because opinion polls had credited him with 18 or 19 per cent, and partly because all his campaign meetings had been very well attended. An immediate explanation, accepted by Communists and non-Communists, was *l'effet Chirac*, i.e. the widespread belief, encouraged by the media, that the second-ballot contest might be fought out between Giscard and Chirac. PCF spokesmen asserted they had received 'hundreds of letters' from people who said they had voted for Mitterrand just so as to prevent a final contest between two right-wingers. But the 'Chirac effect' cannot wholly account for such a serious Communist reversal.

To say that PCF members were stunned would be an understate-

ment, especially as they had been repeatedly told that 15 per cent was the aim of both Giscard and Mitterrand to 'marginalise' the party. And now 15 per cent was the figure they had to put up with. It must be said, however, that as far as outsiders can judge, it does not look as if the intense disappointment led to despondent apathy: meetings held to discuss the results were packed and lively. As for the CC, it met on 28 April and heard a report from Charles Fiterman. He promised a fuller analysis in due course, and provisionally put forward three hypotheses – the belief that Mitterrand alone seemed capable of beating Giscard, the slow start of the electoral campaign, and the virulence of anti-Communist attacks from all quarters. Fiterman also suggested that the party was paying the price for not having presented a candidate in previous elections, a self-critical opinion that the PCF press has been developing ever since. Finally, he got the CC to endorse unanimously the Politbureau's view that Communist voters should be urged to support Mitterrand at the second ballot, as nothing ought to be neglected to bring about a right-wing defeat.

The commonest view among non-Communists was expressed by Lily Marcou who wrote in *Le Monde* (29 April 1981) that the PCF's setback was 'the penalty' it had had to pay for having given up Eurocommunism in favour of the narrower 23rd congress line. It is an interesting view, but there is no evidence to show that French voters really knew the difference between the two lines. Interestingly, *Le Monde*'s editorial of the day before had asserted that, judging from the fortunes of other western CPs, 'Marxist–Leninist orthodoxy, loyalty to Moscow or otherwise, have less weight than is generally believed at local level'. In the same issue, the paper's editor, Fauvet, wondered if the results did not show that the Communist electorate was more attached to unity than the party leadership. Another interesting hypothesis. But perhaps to concentrate on the PCF's strategy and its impact is to remain on the surface and not to appreciate the social significance of the election results. Most of the social strata set in motion by the May 1968 events as well as a section of the working class were drawn towards two kinds of 'reformism' because of their discontent with the effects of the crisis on themselves – the safe 'reformism' of Chirac, which promised greater attention to social improvements whilst leaving the basis of existing society untouched, and the more dynamic 'reformism' of Mitterrand, which promised far-reaching reforms, but short of the 'collectivism' which the Communists were allegedly preaching. Because these social sections were

reformist rather than revolutionary, the 'real change' advocated by the PCF seemed too radical and too frightening. All the same, these sections eagerly wanted 'change' – the word that was on nearly everybody's lips, from the candidates to the electors – and that may well explain why as many as 72 per cent of those who cast their vote had rejected Giscard. It may also explain why it was comparatively easy for some of the supporters of Gaullist 'reformism' to back social-democratic 'reformism' at the second ballot and give Mitterrand a resounding victory.

For on 10 May it was announced that after twenty-three years' uninterrupted right-wing government, France had at last elected a man of the left, François Mitterrand. Final results gave him 15,714,598 votes (51.76 per cent) and Giscard 14,647,787 votes (48.24 per cent). Delirious celebrations took place at the Place de la Bastille and throughout France. The PCF wanted to share in the joy, and did so with the feeling that its own contribution had been 'decisive', an assessment which few observers disputed because the party's campaign in support of Mitterrand had not lacked enthusiasm and because nearly all of Marchais's first-ballot supporters switched over to Mitterrand at the second ballot. Moreover, some of Mitterrand's highest scores were achieved in areas where the PCF had done especially well on 26 April. Thus, in seven *départements* (Aude, Ariège, Seine-Saint-Denis, Nièvre, Haute-Vienne, Haute-Garonne, and Hautes-Pyrénées) where Mitterrand got over 60 per cent of the votes cast, Marchais had polled over 20 per cent (27.3 per cent in Seine-Saint-Denis and 24.3 per cent in Haute-Vienne). The same trend was noticeable in big towns where the PCF was strong, such as Nîmes, Amiens, Saint-Etienne, to mention only a few.

On 15 May the CC heard a report from Marchais. He confirmed the party's assessment of the second-ballot result as 'the victory of hope', which was *L'Humanité*'s headline on the 10th. That victory, he said, had ushered in a situation which was 'unprecedented' and 'complex'. On the one hand, the desire for change was obvious, but on the other hand, it was equally obvious that this strong desire had eclipsed concern for the content of change. As for the PCF, it would support 'any step forward', which was tantamount to saying that some change was better than no change at all. Marchais then referred to the party's immediate tasks – improving its activity by taking greater account of the specific needs of various social strata, including the working class 'in the diversity of all the categories which constitute it'; preparing



itself for the legislative elections; and negotiating with the PS. With regard to the last point, he said that the PCF's own proposals, embodied in his *Plan de luttes*, remained valid, but as a long-term aim. Agreement should be sought with the Socialists on less radical, but urgent goals, such as reducing unemployment, boosting production, democratisation, and an independent foreign policy. The tone was moderate and conciliatory, and at no time did the PCF leader speak of 'conditions'.

The 'complex' character of the situation referred to by Marchais lay in the fact that the PCF was now part of a left-wing majority – for the first time since the Liberation – and yet had sustained a major electoral setback. In order to regain its influence, it decided, as usual, to step up its activity in 'the mass movement', not in order to oppose the new government, but to ensure that it would carry out its pledge of making life better for the people, especially the poorest sections. In *Révolution* a Politbureau member, Guy Hermier, asserted that Communists were 'ready to go as far and as fast as the working people want' (15–21 May 1981), and an editorial in *L'Humanité* declared: 'What is needed today is that we should put ourselves at the service of the popular movement, which remains decisive . . .' (16 May 1981). The CGT displayed the same 'realism' as the party, and on its behalf Séguy stated that it would not stage a series of strikes but would seek the satisfaction of its members' demands through negotiation.

As soon as the presidential election results were known, Marchais warmly congratulated Mitterrand and said that the PCF was 'ready to assume all its responsibilities, including that of taking part in the government', which was a polite way of saying that there ought to be Communist ministers. However, both Mitterrand and the PS were unwilling to commit themselves without securing definite PCF guarantees, and they argued that no decision could be taken until after the General Election, which had been called by the new President in the hope of getting a left-wing parliamentary majority. Talks between the two parties did take place before the first ballot, due to be held on 14 June, and also between ballots to discuss mutual *désistements*, but although the PCF went out of its way to be conciliatory, and although a number of 'convergences' were noted, nothing like a common government programme was signed, and no promise was given to let the Communists have ministerial posts. The results of the first ballot were as follows:

	Votes	*Percentage of votes cast*	
PCF	4,065,540	16.17	
PS & MRG	9,432,362	37.51	55.73
Gauchistes	334,674	1.33	
Other left	183,010	0.72	
Ecologists	271,688	1.08	
RPR	5,231,269	20.80	
UDF	4,827,437	19.20	43.15
Other right	704,788	2.80	
Extreme right	90,422	0.35	
	People	*Percentage of electorate*	
Abstentions	10,783,694	29.10	
		Percentage of poll	
Spoilt papers	368,091	1.00	

There were 156 deputies elected at the first ballot (because they got an absolute majority), of whom seven only were Communists. The great winner was the PS, 'the President's party', and the great loser was the right. The very high number of absentions was partly due to the weather (it had been a beautiful sunny day) and partly to the feeling of many voters that one electoral contest in any given summer was enough. As for the PCF, although it slightly improved its percentage by comparison with the presidential election, its total number of votes dropped a little. One of the reasons put forward was that a substantial number of those who had voted Communist in the past, because the PCF was 'the party of change', now turned to the Socialists, whose party had become the party of realistic change.

The second ballot was held on 21 June in the 334 constituencies in which no candidate had obtained an absolute majority the week before. The results were: left, 10,617,917 (56.8 per cent of the votes cast); right, 8,082,192 (43.2 per cent). The total percentages in all constituencies won by the left were: PCF, 59.4 per cent, right, 40.6 per cent; PS, 56.3 per cent, right 43.7 per cent. In the new assembly, the Socialists had 269 seats (an absolute majority), the PCF 44 (−42), the MRG 14 (+4), other left 6 (+5), the RPR 85 (−70), the UDF 62 (−57) and other right 11 (−3).

Following the elections the PCF and the PS met again, and after long talks, they finally signed an agreement on the basis of which four Communist ministers entered the government headed by Pierre

Mauroy. It was ironic that one of the party's fondest dreams – returning to the government after a thirty-four-year absence – came true at a time when it had sustained its worst electoral setback. It was even more ironic (and perhaps the bitterest pill to swallow) that it had been made possible, not as a result of 'popular pressure' on the PS, but, if anything, as a result of 'popular pressure' ('the verdict of universal suffrage') on the PCF itself. The four Communist ministers were Charles Fiterman, who in addition to being given the post of Minister of Transport, was also made Minister of state, i.e. one of the PM's close advisers; Anicet Le Pors, whose full title was *ministre délégué auprès du premier ministre chargé de la Fonction Publique et des réformes administratives* (i.e. Minister in charge of Civil Servants[6] and administrative reforms working in conjunction with the PM); Jack Ralite, who became Minister of Health; and Marcel Rigout, who became *ministre de la Formation professionnelle* (i.e. in charge of Further Education and Vocational Training). Although the PCF insisted that these were important posts and that Communist ministers were *des ministres à part entière*, i.e. that they had the same rights as other ministers, this was not the view of other prominent members of the government, one of whom tactlessly referred to his PCF colleagues as 'errand boys'. This, of course, may have been said to pacify the American government, which had openly expressed its misgivings. The truth, however, was that the posts were undoubtedly minor posts, but that the mere presence of Communists in the government gave the party some prestige and respectability.

Among the points in the PCF–PS agreement, there was the pledge to improve the lot of the worst off, gradually and according to the state of the economy; the promise to reduce the working week, extend the public sector, democratise political life, and launch a two-year plan against unemployment and for economic growth; and finally, the commitment of both parties to the simultaneous dissolution of all military blocs, to the reduction of armaments in Europe, to negotiations on the presence of Soviet SS20 missiles and the installation of American Pershing missiles, and to the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan and an end to all outside interference. It was the section on foreign policy which attracted most attention and led some observers to speak of the Communists' 'total surrender'. Communist propaganda presented matters differently and argued that on Afghanistan, for example, the PCF had always advocated the withdrawal of Soviet troops, provided there was no outside interference,

and it pointed out that the joint agreement did in fact mention both points.[7] The PCF also said that the two parties did not need to have the same assessment of the origin of the Afghan crisis in order to agree about the role that the French government could play towards its solution; in other words, they could act jointly towards securing a political settlement which would lead to the withdrawal of Soviet troops, even if one side believed they should never have gone in in the first place, and the other justified their intervention. A significant part of the agreement was the reference to the 'unbroken' government solidarity expected from the signatories (*une solidarité sans faille*) although the statement went on to say that each party remained attached to 'its own personality' and its own 'fundamental positions'.

The PCF–PS agreement of June 1981 was much milder than the 1972 Common Programme, let alone its 1977 'updated' version demanded by the Communists. Why then did the PCF sign it? The answer seems obvious: taking part in the government was at that price. But this explanation immediately raises a number of questions: Did the party want to be in the government, and why? Did not the leadership know that Mitterrand's aim was to have the Communists as junior partners the better to dominate them and check them? What did the Communists themselves have to gain from being associated with measures which they described – and *continue to describe* at the time of writing – as insufficient? Many wild guesses are possible and have indeed been made, but the party's own explanation was straightforward enough. It was that universal suffrage had spoken and its verdict had to be respected. One may take this at face value, not necessarily because one believes in the PCF's democratic sincerity, but because the alternative to accepting the people's verdict would have been to confine the party to sterile opposition. Of course, the leaders knew about Mitterrand's strategy – he had never tried to hide it – but they took the view that they could accept his challenge, because it was not a foregone conclusion that the Communist presence in the government would 'marginalise' the party; it could well have the opposite effect. As for the fact that Mitterrand's programme did not go far enough, it was nevertheless true that it was a 'step forward', and Marx had said long ago that every step forward is 'more important than a dozen programmes'. It is tempting to say that the PCF swallowed its pride and to declare with *Le Canard Enchaîné* that it was in power all right, but in the power of the Socialists (*Le PC au pouvoir . . . des socialistes*), but that would not be a fully accurate

description of the position. First, because PCF deputies retained the right to make 'constructive criticisms' of the government, just like their PS colleagues – a point which the PCF press was not slow in stressing, and secondly, because of the party's involvement in 'mass organisations' such as the CGT. The CGT, of course, is not bound by any *solidarité sans faille* with the predominantly Socialist government, and although it has expressed its willingness to co-operate with it, it has also made it clear that it would press for bolder measures as and when required. That both the PCF and the CGT intended to retain their right of criticism and even of mild dissent from government decisions was demonstrated by the 24th congress and above all by the first three years of PCF ministerial participation.

The 24th congress (February 1982)

The pre-congress discussion was launched in October 1981 when the CC published a draft resolution and called on the membership to debate it in their party units (cells, sections and districts) as well as through the columns of *L'Humanité*. Of the former discussion an outsider is naturally not in a position to have accurate knowledge, and all that can be safely asserted, mostly on the basis of voting figures and reports published in the national and regional party press, is that there was neither a massive rank-and-file revolt nor a sheep-like endorsement of the leadership's views. At the congress itself, Guy Hermier's report revealed that 86 cells out of 27,541, and 5 sections out of 3,090, had rejected the CC's text, and that out of the 20,514 delegates who attended district conferences, 20,189 had supported the draft resolution, 232 had abstained and 93 had voted against it.[8] Other reports show that, although at all levels of the party the votes in favour represented a substantial majority, unanimity was the exception rather than the rule. It is unfortunately impossible to be more precise on this issue because of the widespread tendency (neither imposed nor condemned by the leadership) to send homogeneous delegations from each district, with the result that minority views were seldom voiced at the congress. One notable exception was the Haute Garonne district, which elected a dissident, Daniel Garipuy, as one of its delegates. In his congress speech, Garipuy declared that he would abstain in the final vote and he expressed the wish that in future other party units would follow the example of his own district.[9] Equally significant is the fact that, according to Hermier, 465 amendments to the draft resolution were submitted by district conferences, and 1,635 by



individual members or lower party units. Out of this total, 241 amendments were adopted by Congress.[10]

In the two-month discussion in *L'Humanité*[11] the chief contentious issue was the analysis of the party's electoral setback. Broadly speaking, there were two trends, with a minority taking the view that the trouble lay with the 'sectarian policies' of the 1977–81 period (especially the attacks on the Socialists), and a majority agreeing with the leadership that the 'minor mistakes' of that period were less important than the party's slow response, from 1956 onwards, to the great changes which had taken place in French society, especially the fact that most French men and women had become 'salaried workers', its belated working out of an immediate strategy of socialist advance wholly based on French realities, and its insufficient stress on its own distinctive identity. With regard to the difference between 1977 and 1981, one contributor, Michel Tinelli, made the point that if the PCF had agreed to a bowdlerised Common Programme in 1977 it would have become the prisoner of such a limited programme and would not have been able to advocate 'real change' without appearing to betray unity. He added that it was mistaken to describe the 1981 PCF–PS agreement as 'less advanced' than the 1972 Common Programme because the latter was a comprehensive pre-election pledge to carry out a number of reforms, whereas the former was merely the post-election acknowledgement of what the two signatories assessed as the recently expressed people's will. The June 1981 agreement, he asserted, did not commit either party to specific figures and deadlines and thus left each of them free to campaign for its own ideas, always taking care not to be too far ahead of 'popular consciousness'. Such a view seems to be that of the leadership, as it now believes that it is not agreements between the PCF and the PS which are obsolete, but the concept of a government programme which precedes the 'mass movement' instead of reflecting, step by step, the level it has reached.

The 24th congress began on 3 February 1982 with a five-hour speech by Marchais. After an introduction which developed the now familiar theme of *le retard de 1956* and its consequences, he presented his remarks under four headings, first, the party's understanding of '*socialisme à la française*' (a society based on justice, new economic growth, freedom and a cultural renaissance); secondly, an analysis of 'how and with whom to advance' (how: by extending democracy and waging the class struggle; with whom: the working class, the employees, the intellectuals, the farmers, women and youth, in other

words, 'the overwhelming majority of the people'); thirdly, an assessment of the international situation (in which the speaker stressed the importance of the struggle for peace and reasserted the PCF's 'solidarity with Communist parties in power', a solidarity which did not preclude criticism); and finally, a section of the role of the party and the need to give 'another dimension, a new style to [its] mass work'. It was in the second section that Marchais spoke of the PCF's stand since 10 May 1981. He stated that Communists welcomed the steps already taken by the government, but he did not hide the fact that serious problems, such as unemployment, inflation and 'lack of democracy, within and outside the workplace', were still awaiting solutions. He summed up the PCF's attitude by quoting what he himself had said in his December 1981 CC speech: 'Not so much to denounce, but to explain; not so much to criticise, but to propose; and not only to explain and propose, but to build, to achieve, to accomplish, to implement – today, that is, in all fields, the Communists' guiding rule.'[12]

The Resolution adopted by the 24th congress was divided into three parts. The first one dealt with the 'lessons to be drawn from the last decades'. It spoke of a 'new historical era', both for France and for the world, and stressed that 'for the first time in France, socialism is on the agenda, not as a distant and consequently abstract prospect, but as the concrete answer called for by our society's pressing problems'. Whilst reiterating the point that the PCF had lagged behind in defining its strategy of 'democratic socialist advance', it added the proviso that the delay, serious though it was, did not mean that the party had been passed by and left in the wilderness. The twenty-odd years since 1956 were not 'wasted years', despite the fact that French Communists could have displayed greater analytical depth and bolder initiatives. The second section, entitled 'Socialism for France', once again described the PCF's aim as 'democratic, self-managing socialism', and once again insisted that such an aim fully took into account French realities, the realities of the crisis, and international realities. The last part of this section, 'Democratic advance today', outlined the party's stand in the present 'unprecedented situation' by saying that 'new opportunities' had arisen since May 1981 and that it was by no means a foregone conclusion that Mitterrand's victory would lead to 'a social-democratic experiment': 'It is possible to implement another policy than that of managing the crisis in the interests of big business.' What was needed, the resolution stated, was the people's own

involvement at every stage of the battle, 'for the class struggle did not come to an end on 10 May'. The PCF was determined to wage this struggle, not against the government, but as part of the new left majority. In the final section of the resolution, all Communists were called upon to develop a 'new political practice', which involved listening to working people's demands and worries, showing in practice that they belonged to a party which was at the same time 'a party of struggle and a party of government', and doing everything in their power to 'improve and enrich' the party's democratic life.[13]

As usual at a PCF congress, the number of foreign delegations was very high – 112 in all, mostly from Communist parties, but some from national-liberation movements. Observers noted that especially warm applause greeted the Soviet and Polish delegations, and also that for the first time since the 1960s, the Chinese Communist Party was represented.[14] Elections to the party's leading bodies produced no surprises. The CC was made up of 145 members, of whom twelve were new, the Politbureau of twenty-two members, of whom two were new (both of them active CGT unionists), and the secretariat of seven members, of whom one was new. As expected, Fiterman remained on the secretariat despite having become a government minister, and Georges Marchais was re-elected to the post of General Secretary. In his closing speech the latter warned the right that their hopes of dividing the left would be disappointed because the PCF and the PS, although different, could and would continue to work together in implementing the policies for which the French people had voted.

The first three years of PCF government participation (1981–4)

This final section should be seen as a postscript which is mostly contemporaneous with the events it relates and discusses. More than any part of the present chapter, it is bound to be incomplete and provisional – incomplete, because the story is still going on and will not obligingly stop when these pages are ready to go to press; provisional, because the full significance of the period cannot be properly grasped until a little more water has flown under the bridge. The author's only justification for not stopping at the 24th congress is that subsequent developments have shown both the achievements and the difficulties of the left in power and have raised in a new way the issue of the PCF's role in France's political life.

The left government's most important achievements are in the field of home policy. In the first two years of its life, it was able to check the rise of unemployment, and one of Mitterrand's early measures was the creation of 200,000 new jobs in the Civil Service. However, the position seems to have deteriorated, so that in April 1984 the Prime Minister forecast 2.4 million unemployed by the end of the year, a figure which was challenged by the CGT and *Force Ouvrière*, both of which spoke of a possible 3 million. Apart from urging the government to tackle more vigorously the twin problems of increased production and lower unemployment, the PCF also called on the workers themselves to intervene, both by means of protest actions and by taking advantage of the new rights they have won and of the new opportunities at their disposal. One new opportunity, for example, is the scheme launched by Jack Ralite, the Communist Employment Minister since March 1983, a scheme whereby the state would provide financial assistance and adequate training arrangements to those firms which agreed to supply one another with the goods they respectively required. The October 1983 issue of the *Cahiers du Communisme* described such a scheme as 'one more tool at the workers' disposal', but it stressed that the government could not impose it and that the employers were not likely to jump at it; it was therefore up to shop stewards and workplace committees to fight for it.

Among the positive measures introduced by the left government, one must mention the abolition of the death penalty (September 1981); the decrees issued between January and March 1982 which resulted in the 39-hour week, five weeks paid holidays, retirement at the age of sixty on a bigger pension, a 12 per cent increase in the minimum wage (SMIC), a twenty-seven per cent increase in family allowances, free abortion, and the provision of youth training schemes; the extension of nationalisation (bringing three million more workers into the public sector); the law on decentralisation, which allows for greater regional autonomy; and the control of inflation. In the light of such a record, the PS and the PCF felt entitled to assert in December 1983 that the government's achievements were 'already superior to the important gains of the Popular Front and the Liberation'. However, PCF propaganda has also stressed that the impact of the changes would be felt only to the extent that the people themselves took advantage of them.

The other side of the coin is constituted by the left's electoral setbacks in local elections and by the government's unpopular meas-



ures. The first electoral setback occurred in the March 1982 cantonal elections in which the right secured 1,147 seats against 798 for the left, although the gap in terms of votes was much smaller (49.92% for the right and 49.59% for the left). Of course, local elections frequently tend to favour the Opposition, if only because they provide a reasonably safe outlet through which some discontent with the government can be expressed without jeopardising its chances of survival. In this respect, the March 1982 cantonal elections did not come as a great surprise; however, after the euphoria of the previous summer, the ruling parties (PS, PCF and MRG) were somewhat shaken, which is not necessarily a bad thing. On 21 March, the PCF Politbureau issued a statement which condemned the right-wing's 'demagogy'; urged the government to carry out the policies on which it was elected, taking great care that the effect of its reforms be 'clearly perceived by the French people – especially the most under-privileged – in their daily lives'; and finally, pledging that the PCF would 'continue to assume all its responsibilities'. Privately, many PCF members went a little further and expressed their serious concern, based on experience, that 'in their daily lives', the majority of French people had not yet felt the boons of a 'socialist' government.

The second electoral setback took place at the March 1983 municipal elections. At the first ballot, the Opposition polled nearly thirteen million votes, the left nearly ten million, and the centre left about two million. (The centre left, or *gauche centriste*, was a new electoral alliance, not unlike the SDP-Liberal alliance in this country.) Another worrying feature was that nearly eight million people (21.6 per cent of the electorate) abstained. The situation was so serious that on the eve of the second ballot, the PS, the PCF, the MRG and the PSU issued a joint appeal urging abstainers to go to the polls. As a result, the Opposition landslide which had been confidently forecast did not materialise. The right was still ahead of the left by about one million votes but it did not gain control of as many cities as it had expected. As for the PCF, it lost some of its traditional bastions (including Saint-Etienne, Nîmes, Béziers, Saint-Quentin, Arles, Sète and Chelles), but it ended with a total of 185 town councils. When the CC met on 19 and 20 April, it proceeded to a detailed analysis of the results and came to the conclusion that, contrary to the claim that the PCF had been 'routed', it had in fact made some modest but undeniable advances. It pointed out, among other things, that the left had 'resisted well' where the Communists were strong and

that it was the PS rather than the PCF which had suffered losses (some of them important) in those working-class areas where discontent was highest. This encouraged Marchais to suggest cautiously that, slowly but surely, the PCF had started to 'climb back'. Earlier on, after admitting that the party's recovery would 'take a long time and require much effort', he had asserted: 'We are racing on a deceptively flat level, *Nous sommes sur un faux plat*'.

One of the immediate sequels of the municipal elections was a government reshuffle. The PM drastically curtailed the size of his cabinet from thirty-five to fifteen. Whilst Fiterman and Rigout remained in the cabinet and held their former posts, the other PCF ministers became Secretaries of State outside the cabinet, and Jack Ralite was switched from Health to Employment. The reshuffle also strengthened the centre-right in the PS by making the Finance Minister, Jacques Delors, number two in the cabinet hierarchy. It is worth noting that shortly before the reshuffle the leader of the PS left-wing, Jean-Pierre Chevènement, had resigned from his position as Minister for Industry. It was this new cabinet, described by its leader as a 'fighting government', which adopted the austerity measures (which are discussed below) known as the *plan de rigueur*.[15] To what extent Fiterman and Rigout fought against the plan inside the cabinet chamber we naturally do not know.

Another sequel of the March 1983 elections was that in a few areas the battle had to be fought all over again, following right-wing complaints that a number of successful left-wingers (mostly Communists) had been guilty of 'irregularities'. Although the candidates concerned hotly denied the charges, the complaints were upheld by an administrative tribunal and eventually by the *Conseil d'Etat*, the supreme civil court in the land. In the new contests, the PCF lost control in most of the working-class areas, once part of the famous 'Red Belt' outside Paris, where it had had a mayor. (One of them, however, was re-elected.) What was equally worrying, for the left as a whole as well as for the party, was the number of votes which had gone to the fascist *Front National*, which is an exact replica of the racist National Front in Britain, in areas with a high proportion of immigrants. (Most of the latter, of course, could not vote, as they were not of French nationality.) For example in the town of Dreux the Socialists were beaten by a right-wing list which included the Gaullist RPR and four members of the *Front National*. This unholy alliance was condemned by some Gaullists, but their leader, Jacques Chirac, appeared to condone it



after the event.[16] The PCF comment was that the Opposition would stop at nothing to undermine the government, including the exploitation of racial antagonisms.

Of the harsh measures taken by the government, the most important to date are the three devaluations since Mitterrand came to power, the March 1983 *plan de rigueur* and the March 1984 steel plan. The three devaluations occurred in October 1981, in June 1982 and in March 1983. According to the PCF and some other left-wingers, they were dictated by the IMF and accepted by France without a fight. The *plan de rigueur* was launched on 25 March 1983. Its general aim was said to be the curbing of inflation and the cutting of the foreign trade deficit, and in order to achieve this aim, the government imposed higher taxes; it increased rail fares, telephone, gas and electricity charges, and the price of alcohol and tobacco; and it set a limit to the amount of cash which may be taken out of the country (about £180 per person). The adoption of this plan was bound to put a great strain on PCF–PS relations. The Communists had to display great skill in order to criticise the measure (both because they genuinely disapproved of it and because the unions' reaction had been hostile), whilst, at the same time, taking great care not to destroy left unity. The criticism was expressed by Marchais, who declared that the PCF was not against 'rigour' *per se*, but went on to define the word as involving the rejection of austerity, thus implying that the government's measures were not a serious, *rigorous* way of tackling the country's economic problems. The *rigueur* which Communists wanted, he added, was the strict management of the economy, one which took into account existing realities as well as the people's long-term needs and interests. The PCF put forward alternative proposals and called on the working people to do their utmost to make the government change course. In Parliament, PCF deputies tabled five amendments to the plan, and André Lajoinie, the leader of the group in the National Assembly, demanded an early meeting with the Prime Minister. After a long discussion, Mauroy made a few concessions, one of them not unimportant (exempting the lower paid from the additional 1 per cent tax) and pledged that the PCF's other proposals would be 'borne in mind'. The PCF deputies then agreed to vote for the government, whilst reserving the right to table some of their amendments later. Technically, the Communists were not called upon to vote for the *plan de rigueur* as such but for a bill allowing the government to issue decrees to implement parts of the plan.

The months which followed the *plan de rigueur* widened the gap between the government and the working people, and on the 24 January 1984 *The Times* Paris correspondent reported that 'farmers, civil servants, steelworkers, miners, shipyard workers, Communists and parents of pupils (were) all up in arms over their various grievances'. But the harshest blow came when the government announced its steel plan at the end of March 1984. Its aim was the restructuring of the steel industry (nationalised since 1982) to ensure that, in compliance with EEC decisions, it would receive no further subsidies after 1987. Other areas already affected by the implementation of EEC policies included the car industry, textiles, shipbuilding, coal and agriculture, but the steel plan was especially drastic since it involved the closure of many plants, mostly in Lorraine, and the loss of some 30,000 jobs. Thirty billion francs would be invested between 1984 and 1987, but after that date the steel industry would have to stand on its own feet. In order to sweeten the pill somewhat, Mitterrand pledged that those who became redundant would qualify either for early retirement or for a two-year retraining.

Hostility to the steel plan was immediately voiced by the main unions and by the PCF. On the latter's behalf, Marchais complained that it was 'precisely the ultra-modern plants which (were) going to be destroyed', and he added that his party, being 'resolutely in favour of modernisation', advocated the only road which could lead to it, viz. the creation of jobs coupled with 'a policy of growth such as the left promised to carry out'. The PCF also decided to support the steelworkers' march on Paris which took place on 13 April by sending a small token delegation, headed by Marchais, whilst claiming to respect the predominantly trade union character of the demonstration. On the same day Philippe Herzog published the party's counter-plan in *L'Humanité*. He claimed that mutual co-operation among all industries and between the government and the firms could lead to keeping steelworkers in employment, to an increase in steel production up to 21 million tonnes in two years, and to the creation of new jobs. As for the money required to implement the proposed policy of growth and jobs, he suggested it should come from the industrialists (through taxes on imports, for example), from national and regional banks, and finally from the thirty billion francs already earmarked for the steel industry by the government.

The PCF's openly critical stand on the steel plan was bound to raise rather sharply the issue of its continued presence in the government,



all the more so since the Socialists had been showing their impatience for some time. For example, at their October 1983 congress they demanded from the PCF that it should match its words with its deeds and cease criticising a government in which it claimed it wanted to stay. A few weeks later, they made the same point at the joint meeting of the PS and the PCF, which had ostensibly been convened on 1 December 1983 in order to review the government's two-and-a-half year record. In the end, the two parties decided to set up working groups and they issued a joint declaration. The latter was welcomed by the Socialists because it acknowledged the fact that unforeseen difficulties had arisen since 1981, but it was also welcomed by the Communists because it reasserted the need to pursue the policy of change launched by the left. It is in the nature of such compromise documents that each side can invoke them when new differences arise, and this is indeed what happened in April 1984. The Socialists insisted that their partners, having signed the December agreement, were not morally entitled to attack the steel plan, and they laid great stress on the paragraph which asserted that the worsening of the crisis had 'led the government of the left, on pain of jeopardising the whole of its action, to show its determination to tackle the situation by taking a number of rigorous steps, *des mesures de rigueur*'. The Communists replied that the joint statement nowhere mentioned closures and redundancies, but did in fact stipulate the aim of making 'significant advances in such important areas as growth, employment and fiscal justice'. In his 18 April press conference Marchais declared that the PCF government participation was not 'unconditional', but rested on a clearly defined policy. He implied that if the government took steps which made the carrying out of this policy impossible, then it was they who put themselves in an indefensible position, not those who issued warnings and put forward alternative proposals. Marchais also defended the PCF practice of trying to involve the workers on the grounds that popular intervention was crucial against 'the violent offensive of the right and the employers', that discussing the best way forward with the workers strengthened the left, and that consulting the people was the essence of democracy. The Socialists remained adamant and they demanded a 'clarification' of the PCF's position. After consulting with Mitterrand, Mauroy decided that the best way of achieving such a clarification was for his government to seek a vote of confidence in Parliament, hoping that this would drive the Communists into a corner: if they voted for him, they could hardly go on

criticising him; if they voted against him or abstained, their ministers would have to go.

This, at any rate, was the PS thinking behind the move. As it happened, the vote of confidence was duly moved on 20 April, but as Mauroy had asked for an endorsement of his general policy rather than of the steel plan as such (although he made it clear in his speech that the plan was there to stay), Communist deputies voted for the government whilst continuing to express their reservations and concern. So, nothing was really clarified, or rather the so-called 'clarification' did not take the form intended by the Socialists. It was rather the Communists who claimed that they had made things crystal clear by reasserting their commitment to left unity and to the government's broad objectives, and at the same time their right to put forward their own proposals for the implementation of such aims. Although the government and the PS were glad to have secured the PCF's parliamentary support, they immediately pointed out that the party was inconsistent and that its words contradicted its vote. The Communists rejected the charge. They said that they wanted to contribute to the necessary debate *within the left*, that their concern and reservations were shared by millions who had voted for the left and still wanted it to succeed, and that all they were demanding was that the government should consult the workers before committing itself. To the complaint that the PCF had one foot inside the cabinet and one foot outside, they replied with their own formula, 'In the government and with the workers', adding that there was no contradiction between the two because a left-wing government is powerless without the working people's support, just as a right-wing government needs the backing of the employers and the bankers. Finally, with regard to the Communist presence at the 13 April demonstration, they claimed that it was not hostile to the government for the simple reason that the demonstration itself was not directed against Mitterrand, but was rather a perfectly legitimate attempt to put pressure on him. And the PCF press repeatedly drew a parallel between the steelworkers' march and the 25 April demonstrations which took place throughout France to demand a revision of the government's bill which provides for local authorities' financial assistance to Catholic schools: at those demonstrations, together with a score of secular organisations, the Socialist party was officially represented, and yet no one accused it of being disloyal to the government!

The preceding account should have revealed that three years after



joining the government (for reasons already examined) the PCF is still anxious to be part of it. Why? In order to answer this question, let us begin with the case which might be made out against continued participation. It would include Mitterrand's shift to the right, or as the *Financial Times* put it on 26 April 1984, the fact that he 'has shed his Marxist cap . . . and has absorbed much free market reasoning'; his openly Atlanticist and pro-EEC foreign policy; the fact that the PCF government presence has not paid off electorally; and finally, the charge put forward by some rigid Marxists that participation in a 'social-democratic' government is unprincipled. The PCF leadership rejects all these objections. First, without denying Mitterrand's shift to the right (though it never accused him of this crime in so many words), it remains convinced that the trend is not irreversible, partly because 'free market' policies are bound to lead to a dead end, and partly because they can be defeated by the people's intervention. Whether one should admire this display of Marxist confidence or not, one must also note the extent to which Mitterrand and many French Socialists (not all) are willing to experiment with what they call 'pragmatism' and 'realism'. As for popular intervention, it is true that there have been many strikes and demonstrations, but so far they have had little impact on the government. On foreign policy issues, the PCF has contented itself with putting forward its own views and it has generally praised Soviet disarmament proposals, but it has refrained from aggressively challenging the government, thinking (probably rightly) that this would only have the effect of isolating the Communists. Moreover, the PCF leaders believe that foreign policy should not be assessed in terms of Mitterrand's private views and wishes, but on the basis of France's moderating role in international affairs. With regard to the effect of the PCF's government presence on its electoral fortunes, opinion polls have revealed that most Communist voters favour both the party's participation and its criticisms on the workers' behalf. Finally, the Communist leaders do not believe that participation is unprincipled since it does not preclude criticism of the government's negative actions and since, moreover, the 24th congress had clearly committed the party to it on the basis of the only progressive policy which is possible in France today.

The actual case in favour of participation put forward by the PCF is that it corresponds to the wishes of the party's electorate and rank-and-file members, despite a few abstentions among the former and occasional resignations among the latter; that left unity is indispens-

able in order to defeat the combined attacks of the right and the employers, attacks which have often taken the form of street demonstrations, which the PCF is well suited to combat because of its experience of extra-parliamentary struggles; and lastly, that being in the government is one of the ways of applying the party's latest strategy, in other words, of showing in practice that Communists have given themselves a new identity, that they do not merely repeat old formulas or voice discontent and anger but can also take part in the management of the country's affairs, at national and local levels. As to whether the PCF will be able to keep its ministers in the government and at the same time retain its relative independence, at least until the 1986 General Election, it is difficult to say because the matter does not depend on Communists alone but above all on their Socialist allies. One may venture the forecast that the PS would be very reluctant to unleash social and political unrest by throwing the PCF out and that it would take great care not to be seen as having caused the break-up of left unity. It is also worth pointing out that on 29 April 1984 the leader of the PS left-wing, Chevènement, had this to say about the Communists: 'Of course, they are at times awkward partners. But their openly proclaimed motivations – concern about employment, the will to reindustrialise the country, love of progress – these are also ours. . . . As for left unity, it has always been achieved both against the right wing inside the Socialist party and against the Stalinist wing of the Communist party.'

One final issue remains: is the PCF equipped to play its new role, and if so, will this help it to recover its lost ground? In the course of conversations with the author (see Appendix 7), Pierre Juquin, a Politbureau member, and Roger Martelli, a CC member, have admitted that many party members had not yet fully assimilated the party's new strategy, that both what has been discarded ('dictatorship of the proletariat', 'Marxism-Leninism', 'proletarian internationalism', etc.) and what has been taken on board as new (pluralism, a novel approach to left unity, efficient running of nationalised firms, etc.) have created some confusion. Juquin spoke of building the Communist Party anew. Meanwhile, as far as an outsider can judge, there is no major internal turmoil, most cells seem to be reasonably active, and membership has remained at the 700,000 level for the past five years or so. What is worrying, however, is that the party is marking time instead of progressing and above all that there is a discrepancy between its stable membership and its dwindling electorate. It may be too



early to draw definite conclusions, but many non-Communist critics believe that the PCF is fast becoming archaic and that it has outlived whatever usefulness and relevance it might have had in the past. I asked Pierre Juquin to comment on this opinion. In his reply (see Appendix 7), he stressed that capitalism was in crisis and that the Communist remedy – building socialism 'in the colours of France' – was more relevant and topical than ever. How soon and to what extent a substantial number of French people will share this view, it would be rash to forecast. The next few years will show whether the PCF has reached the end of the road or whether it is about to enter a new era.

Notes

1 Fauvet, *op. cit.*, p. 569.
2 Cf. Ch. 8, p. 244.
3 Unlike most western CPs, the PCF did not issue an outright condemnation of the decision to introduce martial law in Poland, arguing that nothing should be said or done by outsiders to worsen the Polish situation. At the same time, the party expressed the wish that martial law would be 'temporary', and it stressed the need for an ultimately 'political solution'.
4 Even if the intention was to make 'the bourgeoisie' foot the bill, it was short-sighted (to say the least) to cut local councils' expenditure in this area without having made sure of government and employers' funds first.
5 As the 1979 membership was 702,000 and as 90,700 new recruits joined in the course of 1980, one may safely assume that the number of people who dropped out was roughly 80,000 (702,000 + 90,700 – 709,000).
6 In France civil servants (*les fonctionnaires*) include all those who are paid by the state, e.g. school teachers.
7 Vadim Zagladin, a CPSU spokesman on foreign affairs, was reported by *L'Humanité* (29 June 1981) as having said that the stand taken by the joint PCF–PS agreement was also that of the Soviet government.
8 Cf. *L'Humanité*, 8 February 1982.
9 Cf. *ibid.*, 5 February, 1982.
10 Cf. *ibid.*, 8 February 1982.
11 In his congress report Hermier said that 957 contributions had been received, out of which 230 were published. One may add that the latter included a few which were hostile to the leadership, whilst many expressed support, with or without reservations.
12 For Marchais's report, cf. *L'Humanité*, 4 February 1982.
13 *L'Humanité*, 9 February 1982.
14 The presence of a Chinese delegate did not represent an ideological or political rapprochement between the PCF and the CPC but rather, it was pointed out, their mutual wish to co-operate despite their differences.

15 The government had deliberately avoided the use of the word 'austerity', as it was too reminiscent of its predecessor's vocabulary – and practice.

16 After the election he declared on TV that the *Front National* was a 'natural ally', adding that 'four members of the extreme right in Dreux pose less of a threat than four Communists in the government'.

Postscript: The European elections and their immediate sequels. The European elections of 17 June 1984 revealed three worrying characteristics for the French left. The first one was the record number of abstentions (43 per cent of the electorate), which was among the highest in Europe (with the exception of Britain where 68 per cent abstained) and was rightly interpreted as a vote of censure on the left-wing government. The second one was the serious setback suffered by both the PS and the PCF, whether one compares their results with the 1979 European elections or with the 1981 presidential and General Elections. The following figures strikingly illustrate the losses they incurred:

	1984	*1979*	*Votes lost in comparison with*	
	%	%	*1981 presidential election*	*1981 General election*
PS	20.8	23.5	3½ million	nearly 5 million
PCF	11.3	20.5	2 million	1.7 million

Finally, the racist *Front National* managed to poll 11 per cent of the votes cast, which emboldened its leader to forecast that his 'party' would soon replace the PCF as the country's fourth major political force.

The PCF CC met on 26 and 27 June and assessed the results as 'a serious warning to the left'. After drawing some mild comfort from the fact that the PCF's losses were not due to a switch to other parties but almost exclusively to abstentions, the CC blamed the government for having failed to check unemployment and to raise the people's purchasing power. It concluded by rejecting the view that the PCF had entered a period of irreversible decline, claiming on the contrary that now 'more than ever' France needed a strong Communist party 'capable of attracting the workers and the youth'.

A few days later Mitterrand dismissed Mauroy and appointed a right-wing Socialist, Laurent Fabius, as his new Prime Minister. After holding an emergency session on 19 July, the PCF CC sought a meeting with Fabius, and having failed to secure a pledge that he would boost investment and employment, it decided to withdraw Communist ministers from the government. At the same time, the Communists asserted that they would go on supporting the government in the National Assembly. The only safe predictions one can make at this stage (summer 1984) are, first, that PCF deputies will probably abstain on most economic and financial issues (in order not to vote with the right), secondly, that the party will step up its industrial activity and its 'mass work', and finally, that it will feel freer both to criticise austerity measures and to put forward its own alternative policies.

In lieu of a conclusion

There is an increasing tendency among contemporary PCF writers to entitle their last chapter, *Pour ne pas conclure*. An admirable example to follow at the end of this study! For a definitive conclusion about the history of a party which is still alive and kicking and can generally be relied upon to come up with something new and unexpected is neither possible nor indeed desirable. What is more profitable is to draw up a provisional balance-sheet and to mention some of the key problems the PCF has to face in the present and the future. On the debit side, one can certainly agree with the notion of 'delay' put forward by the party itself, but one should go further back than 1956. It is not unfair to suggest that, from the day of its foundation until the late 1960s, the PCF suffered from a crisis of identity, for the identity it gave itself was largely modelled on the Russian Bolshevik party. Even when it broke new ground in the 1930s, during the war and after the liberation, it continued to believe that the October Revolution constituted a universal model. That it was labelled 'a foreign party' for so long may have been unfair – and at important times certainly was – but it was given some semblance of credibility by its own stance. Also on the debit side, one must mention the polemical intransigence in dealing with external opponents and internal dissidents and the refusal to assess its own past critically. Most of these negative phenomena began to be corrected in the last ten or fifteen years, but much remains to be done, as the inner-party controversies show and as the leadership itself would probably admit.

On the credit side, the positive features are in a sense the other side of the coin, as if the good and the bad co-existed side by side, a fact which might gladden the heart of a Marxist dialectician who believes in 'the fusion of opposites'. For example, notwithstanding its long-standing reliance on the Soviet model, the PCF has truly become a national force, and France's political landscape is unimaginable without it. Perhaps no other Communist party has laid such stress on 'the national role of the working class' and drawn the consequence that 'the party of the working class' must also be the party of the nation, minus of course 'the two hundred families' or their modern equival-

ent. Whether the PCF's patriotism is genuine or merely tactical, few people would deny that it has given French communism a distinct flavour, that of 'jacobinism' in the 1930s or that of 'socialism in the colours of France' in the 1970s. Moreover, the counterpart of the PCF's intransigence is that it has really learned to work with others, above all with the Social-democrats, and has, on the whole, refused to retire into a self-imposed ghetto. Whatever its tactical mistakes on the issue of unity, it has consistently sought unity, if only because it realised that its one chance of ever coming to power was through a coalition. Admittedly, this is a 'fact of life', but its recognition by the PCF can be regarded as something of an achievement. Finally, it is difficult to deny that the PCF has changed, especially since its 22nd congress. It might be helpful to recapitulate the most significant of these changes by comparing the party founded at Tours in 1920 with the PCF of today.

The party founded at Tours claimed to be the revolutionary party of the French working class. The PCF of today makes the same claim, but its understanding of 'revolution' and of 'the working class' has changed. Revolution is no longer conceived as the single act of taking power but as a continuous process involving step-by-step struggles. The working class is still thought to be the one revolutionary class in modern society by virtue of its role in production (creation of 'surplus value', direct exploitation, organised by the capitalist system itself), but it is no longer made up of the old traditional proletariat. It nowadays includes highly skilled workers and technicians and, in addition, there are many diverse categories within it, with specific interests and outlooks. Finally (but this is a trend which tentatively began at the time of the Popular Front), the working class is not seen as the only class interested in socialism. Hence, as we have seen, the need to discard the concept of 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' and put in its place the prospect of a socialist France ruled by the working people, i.e. by the great majority of the nation.

The party founded at Tours came out as the champion of socialism. This is still the *raison d'être* of the PCF today, but the 'socialism in the colours of France' in which it believes is democratic, self-management socialism. The role of the state is not to initiate changes from on high but to reflect and consolidate the changes which have been initiated from below. Moreover, '*socialisme à la française*' does not intend to do away with the private sector altogether. In a country which has taken over the main means of production, there will still be



room for private firms and private initiative. This, it is claimed by French Communists, is not a new version of the so-called 'mixed economy', because it is hoped that the private sector will, in its own way, contribute to and be part of the national planned economy.

The party founded at Tours was a section of the Communist International. The PCF of today claims to be a completely autonomous party, owing neither formal nor moral allegiance to a supra-national body or to a foreign power. It no longer believes, as it did for so many years, in the leading role of the CPSU. Nor does it follow the PCI in advocating 'polycentrism' and a 'third road', believing that the former still implies that general principles can be worked out for a group of countries instead of recognising the singularity of each specific country, and that the latter also rests on the illusion that there is a single correct road to be taken rather than a number of roads (as many as there are countries), each one dictated by the uniqueness of the concrete situation, and yet all united by their common endeavour to do away with the capitalist system, based on profit, exploitation and the arms race. In keeping with this approach, of which the essence is that socialism is a universal requirement, not in spite of the diversity which prevails, but because it is everywhere the only alternative to endless economic crises, unemployment and poverty, the PCF takes the view that a number of countries have already managed to start the building of a new socialist society. These include the fourteen or fifteen countries ruled by 'Marxist–Leninist' parties and also the countries of Africa and Asia which have chosen 'the non-capitalist path'. Each of these countries has followed its own road to socialism. None is free from limitations, shortcomings and problems. But, according to the PCF, they have taken the first, indispensable, step in the right direction, and together, they constitute a great force for peace. Because of this, they deserve the PCF's support. Not the 'unconditional support' which was given to the Soviet Union in the past, but a support stemming from a community of aims, and furthermore, a support which does not preclude constructive criticism. According to the PCF of today, the socialist countries must be seen for what they really are, i.e. neither the embodiment of all that is good nor a creation of the devil, as asserted by Reagan.

The party founded at Tours uncompromisingly declared that it was a party of struggle. The PCF of today continues to believe that no social advance is possible without persistent struggles, which it aims to lead and to co-ordinate. But it also describes itself as a 'party of

government'. This is not a transient phrase, reflecting the presence of Communist ministers in the French government since June 1981, for in fact it was launched well before the left's electoral victory. At the 1979 23rd congress the political resolution stated:

> As a party of struggle, we want and strive ever better to become a party of government. We are and shall always be ready to assume our responsibilities in the service of the working people at all levels, including government level. We are all the more determined to take part in the running of France since the working people will not, without our participation, achieve the changes which they need.[1]

The view that the PCF is both a party of struggle and a party of government is not entirely new, since it was first put forward at the time of the first Communist governmental participation, in 1945–7. But Cominform pressure made the PCF drop the phrase and the concept for a while. It is being loudly revived today in order to stress that the presence of Communist ministers is not a substitute for popular struggles but is meant to supplement these struggles. It is a logical consequence of the notion that revolution is a process. Another significant consequence is that the PCF is no longer afraid of the stigma of 'class collaboration' if it enters a non-revolutionary government. The very idea of a rigid distinction between a revolutionary and a non-revolutionary government has been discarded as it is considered to be no longer applicable today. A left-wing government, even if it is, like the present one, dominated by the 'reformist' Socialist party, can, *with the help of popular pressure*, take steps which begin to challenge capitalism. For the people's own struggles were and remain the cornerstone of the PCF's political stand. This explains its attitude towards the present government. It has so far refused to leave it, even when it has taken measures which the party has openly and sharply criticised (such as the 'rigour plan' of 1983), on the ground that the direction of the government's policy will, in the long run, be decided, not in the cabinet chamber, but by the people themselves. Given the latter's present level of understanding and militancy, the PCF believes that it is in a better position to influence events from the inside rather than from a position of splendid isolation.

The party founded at Tours was a party based on Marxism, and it soon followed the Stalinist practice of describing its theory as 'Marxism–Leninism'. The PCF of today prefers to call itself a party based on 'scientific socialism', as it no longer shares Stalin's view that Marxism is a complete doctrinal whole, made up of fixed universal



laws. Moreover, the rejection of the 'Marxist–Leninist' label, as we have seen, is not intended to play down the importance of Marx and Lenin but rather to stress that their theory (which they themselves describe not as a 'dogma' but as 'a guide to action') is not completed but has to face ever new problems and work out ever new solutions to them. This is what Marx, Engels and Lenin intended, it is claimed by the PCF. At the international colloquium organised by the IRM in Paris in January 1983, Lucien Sève called for a new scientific socialism, characterised by a stress on experimentation (as opposed to dogmatic assertions having the force of laws), on living dialectics (as opposed to the Stalinist conception of 'dialectics' which reduced the latter to a set of general principles, valid in the field of nature as well as in the field of social sciences), and on inventiveness (as opposed to the 'utopian' belief that the last word having been said by the 'classics', all one has to do is to apply their 'teachings').[2]

The party founded at Tours accepted the thirteenth Comintern condition that it should be based on 'democratic *centralism*' (emphasis in the original), which was described as an organisational principle according to which 'iron discipline bordering on military discipline' should prevail 'in the present epoch of acute civil war'. The PCF of today still believes in democratic centralism, but if it had to emphasise one of the two terms, it is the first rather than the second that it would stress. All the changes in party rules since 1936, including the latest 1979 revision, have endeavoured to democratise the party structure, allowing in particular for a considerable extension of inner-party discussion. Expulsions accompanied by character assassination are now a thing of the past. Moreover, the continued rejection of 'factions' is presented as guaranteeing more democracy, not less, on the ground that internal debates are freer and less inhibited when different viewpoints are not institutionalised in the shape of various contending groups.

The party founded at Tours was aware that it was making history, but as it grew and developed it adopted the Stalinist practice of treating its own past as sacred history, in other words, of replacing history with apologetics. The PCF of today no longer treats party history as a taboo subject. Even when it feels the need to protest vigorously against what it calls 'the distortions' of non-Communist historians (and it must be admitted that in this field there are still too many cases of political bias), it does not react hysterically but answers its critics in a calm, reasoned manner. More importantly, party historians are

encouraged to pursue their research without directives from the centre, and often they have laid bare the errors and the shortcomings of former leaders with unusual, biting frankness. Such a critical approach to the past is not confined to historians and intellectuals: at the 24th congress, it was the General Secretary himself who spoke of the twenty-five years' delay which marred the party's recent history. And his remarks were embodied in the congress final Resolution. Self-criticism of this kind is rare enough in any political party; until recently, it was especially rare in a Communist party.

The party founded at Tours could count – or thought it could count – on the revolutionary enthusiasm of the masses, and it was confidently believed that 'the last fight' was about to begin, leading to the long-awaited millenium. The PCF of today knows that it is living in a non-revolutionary situation and that it has to deal with a new working class and with new social strata. The biggest problem which faces it is the need to show its 'topicality', i.e. its relevance to the modern world, and dispel the belief that it is a relic of a bygone era. The problem is sociological, political and organisational. Sociologically, it has to find a common language with the many non-proletarian social groups whose support it never tires of saying is indispensable. This is not a question of getting them to become party members or Communist voters, but of making them shed their suspicions and their hostility, so that they are prepared to allow the PCF to play a role in the nation's political life. Politically, the problem is to find the forms of unity which really work and to become truly pluralistic, in deeds as well as in words. The political problem is complicated by the fact that there is, and will continue to be for some time, a reformist as well as a revolutionary trend among the French working class. 'Peaceful co-existence', which does not preclude but presupposes courteous, firm debate, is the only answer. Organisationally, the PCF has every right to stick to its own principles if it believes that they are best, but it must constantly adapt them if it wants to become a 'mass party'. 'Democratic centralism' was invented by Lenin for a 'party of professional revolutionaries'. It may still be valid for a modern revolutionary party, but it must be made to suit modern conditions, with a greater stress on democracy not being the least important of the changes to be introduced.

The PCF is changing. How deep-seated, lasting and genuine the changes will prove to be we do not know. Neither do we know whether they will help the party to arrest and reverse the decline of its



influence. Only the future will tell. *Qui vivra verra.* However, if one may paraphrase the poet Mallarmé, one may say that, irrespective of past, present and future changes, the PCF will probably remain *Tel qu'en lui-même enfin ses militants le changent* (Such as its own members change it into itself).[3]

Notes

1 *Cahiers du Communisme* (June–July 1979), p. 391.
2 Cf. *Cahiers du Communisme* (May 1983), pp. 100–15.
3 Cf. the first line of Mallarmé's poem on Edgar Allan Poe: *Tel qu'en Lui-même enfin l'éternité le change.*

Appendix 1: The PCF's organisational structure
Summary and analysis of the party rules adopted in 1979

1. Conditions of membership

agreement with the party's objectives
respect for its rules
belonging to a cell
payment of dues (Article 1)

Article 1 adds that 'adherence to materialism is not a condition of membership'. Article 24 states that the cell must 'create the best conditions for members' participation in the party's activity'.

2. Basic organisational principle:

'Democratic centralism'. This involves
(a) discussion at all levels, but majority decisions binding on all.
(b) election of all leading bodies and 'collective leadership' at all levels.
(c) all leading bodies accountable to the membership.
(d) decisions of higher bodies binding on lower bodies.
(e) 'Criticism and self-criticism' at all levels (*note:* in the Communist vocabulary, 'self-criticism' is not a public individual 'confession', but a critical review of activity by the party itself or one of its units).
(f) Absence of 'factions', i.e. organised groups within the party (*note:* according to the PCF, factions lead to internecine strife, impair the party's effectiveness, and are a 'caricature of democracy' since they allow minorities to flout majority decisions).

Note: For the first time, the 1979 Rules describe internal discussion in some detail. Article 7 provides for three types of discussion: (i) within each party unit; (ii) within all advisory committees; (iii) in the party press, 'obligatorily before all congresses and whenever the CC launches a discussion'.

3. Party members' responsibilities

(a) Duties (Article 10): attend meetings, read the party press, improve theoretical knowledge, defend working people's interests, be active in trade unions and other associative bodies, loyalty to other party members, and defence of the party against the 'class enemy'.
(b) Rights (Article 11): vote on decisions, elect members and stand for election to leading bodies, refer matters to higher bodies, criticism of any party



member or unit, be informed of any remark or criticism concerning them.
(c) Article 12 describes party discipline as 'freely consented' and says that all party members are entitled to keep dissentient views, provided they do not jeopardise 'the common implementation of majority decisions'.
(d) Breaches of discipline may lead to sanctions, including expulsion.

4. Party structure

(a) The basic party unit is the cell. (The word is meant to stress that party units are living bodies rather than groups of people who meet casually.) In 1979, there were 28,000 cells. There are three types of cell – workplace, residential and rural cells.
(b) The cells of a given area belong to a *section* and elect a *comité de section*. In 1979, there were 3,000 *sections*.
(c) The *sections* of a given *département* belong to a *Fédération* (district) and elect a *comité fédéral*. In 1979, there were 98 *fédérations*.

5. National bodies

(a) The national congress, convened every three years, is 'the Party's supreme authority.' (Article 37)
(b) The party's executive is known as the Central Committee, and is elected by the national congress. In 1979, it included 145 members. The CC elects a Political Bureau and a secretariat.
(c) The CC may convene a national conference whose decisions apply to the whole party. (Article 44)
(d) The CC may also convene the party national council, which is a consultative body. (Article 46)

6. Elections to leading bodies

(a) Candidates may be put forward by leading bodies, any party unit, or any party member.
(b) A special committee draws up a 'recommended list', but delegates are free to reject it. (Article 50)
(c) All elections are by secret ballot.

7. Communist Youth

The Communist Youth organisation, *Mouvement de la Jeunesse Communiste*, MJC, is organisationally independent of the PCF, but the party is expected to give it 'political and ideological support'. The MJC is divided into the *Jeunesse Communiste* (JC), open to young people at school or at work, and the *Union des Etudiants Communistes* (UEC) which is open to students. At the end of June 1976, the MJC had about 90,000 members.

8. MPs and Councillors (les élus)

(a) MPs and councillors have 'the same rights and duties as other Party members'. (Article 52) They are subject to party control.
(b) Their salaries are paid into the party and 'the CC decides on their use'. (This is intended as a safeguard against careerism.)



9. The party's means of expression
(a) *L'Humanité* is the party's 'central organ'. All members are expected to read it and distribute it. (Article 57)
(b) Every cell is expected to publish and distribute a cell newspaper. (Article 58)

10. Party finances
The PCF's income is derived from 'dues, subscriptions, a proportion of MPs' and councillors' salaries, and party firms'. (Article 59)

Note: The 'party firms' (*entreprises du Parti*) are mostly publishing and printing firms.

Appendix 2: The PCF's social composition and implantation

1. Membership

(a) The PCF is a predominantly working-class party (unlike the PS) and a majority of its leaders are of working-class origin (unlike the PCI's). But it also includes members of the middle strata, the peasantry and the intelligentsia. The latest complete party census of 1966 gave the following figures:

	%
Workers	60.1
Employees	18.75
Intellectuals	9.0
Peasants	6.56
Self-employed	5.77

The 1979 partial census gave the following figures:

		%
Workers & employees	270,000	51
Intellectuals	70,000	13.5
Unemployed	23,000	
Immigrant workers	25,000	
Small farmers	17,000	
Craftsmen & tradespeople	20,000	
Students & school students	12,000	
Old age pensioners	90,000	
People not gainfully employed (especially women)	62,000	

(b) The PCF includes a higher proportion of women than any other French party. In 1959, they made up 22 per cent of the whole membership; in 1966, 25.5 per cent (90,000); and in 1979, 35.7 per cent (250,000).
(c) In terms of age, the percentage of people under twenty-five was 9.4 per cent in 1966 and 11.8 per cent in 1979. The percentage of people in the 26–40 age group was 33 per cent in 1966 and 39 per cent in 1979. In 1966, 17.3 per cent were over sixty.

2. Social implantation

(a) In the post-war period (up to 1981), the PCF's strongest electoral support has come from the industrial north and the rural centre; in the Mediterranean south, the PCF and the PS have commanded roughly the same support. About 50 per cent of PCF voters are working-class (about one-third for the PS).
(b) From the Liberation onwards, the PCF has had members in all *départements*. It is strongest in the industrial north, the northern and western areas of the Massif Central, and the Provence and Rhône valley area.



Appendix 3: PCF Membership figures (1)

Year	Cards issued by the CC	Cards taken up	(2)
1921		109,391	
1924		60,000	
1925		60,000	
1930		30,000	
1934		40,000	
1937		328,647	
1945		544,989	
1946		800,229	(3)
1947	907,785		
1956	429,653		
1961	407,000	300,000	
1964	407,000	300,000	
1966	425,800	350,000	
1969	454,640	380,000	
1972	456,640	390,000	
1973	471,000	410,000	
1974	500,900	450,000	
1975	556,170	491,000	
1976		550,000	(4)
1977		630,000	(5)
1978		702,864	(6)
1980		709,000	(7)
1981		710,000	(8)

(1) Figures up to 1975 are taken from Jean Elleinstein, *Le P.C.* (pp. 96–7), except for the years 1924 and 1925 which are taken from R. Tiersky, *op. cit.*, f/n 20, p. 36.
(2) Elleinstein explains that not all cards sent by the CC to the various districts are actually taken up. He adds that the figures in both columns from 1961 onwards were communicated to him by the party's Organisation Department.
(3) In that year the party claimed to have issued one million cards.
(4) Figure given by Paul Laurent at a press conference, 1977.
(5) Figure given by *L'Humanité*, 9 January 1978.
(6) Figure given by *L'Humanité*, 9 January 1979.
(7) Figure given by *L'Humanité*, 8 January 1981.
(8) Figure given by *L'Humanité*, 18 January 1982.
Figures for 1982 and 1983 remain roughly the same.
(Information supplied to the author by the party secretariat.)

Appendix 4: PCF electoral support since 1924

General Election results

Year	*Approx. no. of votes (millions)*	*Percentage of votes cast*	*Seats*
1924	0.9	9.5	26
1928	1.1	11.3	14
1932	0.8	8.4	12
1936	1.5	15.2	72
1945	5.0	26.0	151
1946 (June)	5.2	26.2	146
1946 (November)	5.7	28.6	169
1951	5.0	25.6	103
1956	5.5	25.4	146
1958	3.9	18.9	10
1962	4.0	21.7	41
1967	5.0	22.5	73
1968	4.4	20.3	34
1973	5.1	21.3	73
1978	5.8	20.6	86
1981	4.0	16.1	44

The above table calls for the following general comments:

(a) In the pre-war period, the year 1936 represents a turning point for the PCF, which becomes a significant parliamentary force for the first time.
(b) Under the Fourth Republic, the PCF becomes the largest single party and gets at least one quarter of the votes cast.
(c) Under the Fifth Republic, the PCF recovers slowly (with the exception of 1968) and gets at least one fifth of the votes cast (with the exception of 1958) until 1981. In the 1981 General Election, the party gets its lowest post-war score, but this has to be seen in relation to the presidential election setback. The presidential election of 1969 showed a result of 4,781,838 votes cast, i.e. 21.52 per cent of votes cast. In the 1981 presidential election, the PCF received 4,446,922 votes, only 15.34 per cent of the votes cast.



Appendix 5: PCF Press and Publishing Activity

1. Newspapers

(a) *Dailies: L'Humanité* (national daily, founded in 1904 by Jean Jaurès and taken over by the PCF after the Tours Foundation Congress. Circulation: circa 200,000).
Liberté (regional daily – North).
L'Echo du centre (regional daily – Centre).
La Marseillaise (regional daily – South).
(b) *Sunday paper: L'Humanité-Dimanche.*
(c) *Weeklies: Révolution* (founded in 1980 as a merger of the weekly *France Nouvelle* – political – and the monthly *La Nouvelle Critique* – political and cultural).
La Terre (for farmers).
Various provincial weeklies.

2. Periodicals

(a) political: *Cahiers du Communisme* (published monthly by the CC).
L'Elu Communiste (largely devoted to the activity of PCF mayors and local councillors).
(b) cultural: *La Pensée*.
(c) on economics: *Economie et Politique.*
(d) on education: *L'Ecole et la Nation.*
(e) on literature: *Europe* (monthly).
Les Lettres Françaises (founded in 1942; ceased publication in 1972).
(f) scholarly: *Cahiers de l'Institut de Recherches Marxistes* (founded in 1980 as a successor to the *Cahiers du C E RM*).
Cahiers d'Histoire de l'Institut de Recherches Marxistes (founded in 1980 as a successor to the *Cahiers d'Histoire de l'Institut Maurice Thorez*).
(The *Institut de Recherches Marxistes* or *IRM* was founded in 1980 as a merger of the *Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Marxistes*, or *C E RM*, and the *Institut Maurice Thorez.*)

3. Organs of the MJC (Mouvement de la Jeunesse Communiste)

(a) published by the *Jeunesse Communiste* (JC): *L'Avant-Garde.*
(b) published by Communist students: *Le Nouveau Clarté*.

4. Publishing firms

(a) Main PCF publishing firm: Editions Sociales.
(b) Other firms: Temps Actuels (succeeds Les Editeurs Français Réunis). La Farandole. Le Livre Club Diderot.
(c) New firm launched in 1981 by the PCF and the MJC: Messidor.



Appendix 6: Chronological Table

Year	*Main developments, especially in France*	*Main developments in the* PCF
1919	March: Foundation of Comintern	
	June: Versailles Treaty	
	November: General Election (*Bloc National* victory)	SFIO gets 20% of votes cast, but loses 30 seats
1920	January: Paul Deschanel becomes President of the Republic Clemenceau resigns	February: SFIO - Strasbourg congress (decision to sound Comintern)
	May: Millerand government	June-July: Cachin & Frossard in Russia
	Failure of railwaymen's strike	
	September: Millerand becomes President	December: PCF Foundation Congress at Tours
1921	June-July: Comintern launches the 'United Front'	
1922	January: Trade union split between CGT and CGTU	
	Poincaré government	
1923	January: France occupies the Ruhr	January: Frossard resigns Secretariat: Sellier & Treint
1924	January: Lenin dies	
	May: General Election (*Cartel des Gauches* victory)	PCF gets over 800,000 votes and 26 seats
	June: Doumergue replaces Millerand	July: 'Bolshevisation' starts
	Herriot government	Sémard becomes party secretary
	October: Dawes Plan	

Year	Main developments, especially in France	Main developments in the PCF
1925	April: Herriot falls July: Ruhr evacuated	
1926	July: Poincaré government	June: Lille congress (Thorez speaks of the links between patriotism and internationalism)
1927	CI adopts 'class against class' tactic	PCF endorses CI tactic
1928	April: General Election (*Union Nationale* victory) Poincaré government July–September: 6th CI congress	PCF gets over 1 million votes but only 14 seats
1929	July: Poincaré retires October: Wall Street crash	
1930		July: CC launches fight on 'two fronts' (against opportunism and secretarianism)
1931	May: Paul Doumer becomes President	
		August: Elimination of Barbé & Célor
1932	May: Doumer assasinated Lebrun becomes President	(Thorez sole Secretary since 1930)
	General Election (*Cartel des Gauches* victory)	PCF gets nearly 800,000 votes and 12 seats
1933	January: Hitler becomes Chancellor	
1934	February: Fascist leagues' march on Parliament and left's riposte Deladier resigns Doumergue government	March: Doriot expelled
	July: PCF and SFIO sign '*unité d'action*' pact	October: Thorez launches Popular Front
1935	July–August: 7th CI congress (adoption of Popular Front strategy) September: Italy attacks Abyssinia	14 July: PCF takes part in Popular Front oath with SFIO and Radicals
1936	March: Reunification	January: 8th congress at

Year	*Main developments, especially in France*	*Main developments in the* PCF
	CGT & CGTU	Villeurbanne
	April–May: General Election (Popular Front victory)	Thorez offers '*la main tendue*' to Catholics
		PCF gets 1.5 million votes and 72 seats
	May: Blum government	PCF does not join government
	May–June: sit-in strikes	
	June: Matignon agreements	
	July: Spanish Civil War begins	PCF denounces 'non-intervention'
		August: PCF launches 'French Front'
1937	February: Blum decides on 'pause'	PCF attacks 'pause'
	June: Blum resigns	PCF offers to join government
	Chautemps government	
		December: 9th congress at Arles
1938	March: Second Blum government	
	April: Deladier government	
	September: Munich agreement	PCF votes against Munich
	December: Bonnet–Ribbentrop 'Declaration of Friendship'	
1939	August: Soviet–German non-aggression pact	26 August: *L'Humanité* banned
	September: Second world war starts	PCF votes for military credits
		26 September: PCF dissolved
		October: PCF advocates peace. Denounces war as 'imperialist'
	December: War between USSR and Finland starts	
1940	March: End of war between USSR and Finland	
	Reynaud becomes Prime Minister	April: PCF deputies tried and sentenced *in camera*
	May–June: *Blitzkreig*	6 June: PCF proposals to change the character of the war
	Pétain sues for armistice	
	Defeat and occupation of France	

Year	*Main developments, especially in France*	*Main developments in the* PCF
	18 June: De Gaulle broadcasts from London	
	July: Pétain government moves to Vichy	10 July: PCF Appeal to the people of France
	Pétain gets 'full powers' and becomes *'Chef de l'Etat Français'*	October: PCF sets up the *Organisation Spéciale* (OS)
1941	February: Darlan government	
		May: PCF launches *Front National* for the independence of France
		May–June: Communists lead miners' strike in the north
	22 June: Hitler attacks the USSR	
1942	February–April: Riom trial of Daladier, Blum etc.	Many Communists arrested and shot
	April: Laval government	April: FTP set up
	8 November: Allied landing in North Africa	
	11 November: Germans occupy the whole of France	
	27 November: French fleet scuttled at Toulon	
	24 December: Darlan assassinated	
1943		January: PCF supports de Gaulle (Grenier's visit to London)
	February: USSR wins battle of Stalingrad	
	Germans set up STO (compulsory deportation of French workers to Germany)	PCF launches slogan: *S'unir, s'armer, se battre*
	April: Reunification of CGT	
	May: CNR *(Conseil National de la Résistance)* set up	

Year	Main developments, especially in France	Main developments in the PCF
	June: Comintern dissolved CFLN set up in Algiers under joint presidency of Giraud and de Gaulle July: Allied landing in Sicily Mussolini falls September: Liberation of Corsica November: De Gaulle becomes sole president of CFLN Teheran conference (Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin)	
1944	February: FFI (*Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur*) set up	
		April: Billoux and Grenier enter CFLN
	6 June: Second Front opened by Allied landing in Normandy August: Liberation of Paris	*L'Humanité* reappears legally November: Thorez returns to France
1945	8 May: VE Day	June: 10th congress
	August: Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs September: Japan surrenders October: Referendum ends 3rd Republic Election of Constituent Assembly (SFIO: 133 seats; MRP: 141 seats)	PCF gets 26% of votes cast and 151 seats November: 5 Communists join de Gaulle's government
1946	January: De Gaulle resigns Gouin (SFIO) heads	



Year	*Main developments, especially in France*	*Main developments, in the PCF*
	government	Six Communists in the government
	May: Rejection of first constitutional draft	
	June: Election of second Constituent Assembly (SFIO: 115 seats; MRP: 158 seats)	PCF gets 26% of the poll and 146 seats
	October: Second constitutional draft approved	
	November: General Election (SFIO: 101 seats; MRP: 158 seats)	PCF gets 28.6% of the poll and 169 seats Thorez's *Times* interview
1947	March: Truman doctrine	
	April: De Gaulle founds RPF	
	May: Remadier dismisses Communist ministers	
	June: Marshall Plan launched	11th congress
	September: Cominform set up	PCF and PCI criticised at Cominform meeting
	November–December: Widespread strikes	PCF supports strikes
	December: SFIO launches 'Third Force' *Force Ouvrière* leaves CGT	
1948	June: Cominform condemns Tito	PCF endorses Cominform condemnation
	October–November: Miners' strike	PCF supports miners' strike
1949	April: NATO set up	
	November: 24-hour strike called by CGT and FO	PCF supports 24-hour strike
1950	February: SFIO leaves government	
		April: 12th congress October: Thorez's illness
1951	June: General Election (SFIO: 107 seats; Radicals: 90 seats; MRP: 95 seats; RPF: 121 seats; Independents: 96 seats)	PCF gets 25.6% of the poll and 103 seats
	September: *Loi Barangé* (aid to religious schools) voted	

Year	*Main developments, especially in France*	*Main developments in the* PCF
1952	January–March: Edgar Faure government	
	March–December: Pinay government	
		May: Anti-Ridgway demonstration
		Duclos arrested (released 1 July)
		September: Marty-Tillon affair
1953	March: Stalin dies	
	Laniel government	
		April: Thorez returns to France
	August: Widespread strikes	PCF supports strikes
1954	May: Fall of Dien Bien Phu	
	Laniel government defeated	
	June: Mendès-France government	June: Lecoeur suspended 13th congress
	July: Geneva agreements end Indo-China war	
	November: Algerian war starts	
1955	February: Mendès-France defeated	
	Edgar Faure government	
	Poujadists hold big meeting	
	May: Warsaw Pact	
	November: Edgar Faure defeated	November: Lecoeur expelled
	December: Dissolution of Parliament	
	Republican Front launched	
1956	January: General Election (SFIO: 89 seats; Radicals: 70 seats; MRP: 71 seats; RPF: 17 seats; Poujadists: 51 seats; Independents: 100 seats)	PCF gets 25.4% of the poll and 146 seats. Advocates Popular Front government
	Mollet's Republican Front government	
	February: 20th CPSU congress	
	March: Mollet asks for 'special powers' to deal	PCF votes for 'special powers'

Year	*Main developments, especially in France*	*Main developments in the PCF*
	with Algeria	
	Independence of Morocco and Tunisia	
	June: Khrushchev's secret speech released in the west	
	July: Nasser nationalises Suez Canal	July: 14th congress (cautious de-Stalinisation)
	October–November: Suez 'adventure'	
	Hungarian crisis	PCF supports USSR's action in Hungary, but many rank-and-file resignations
	Soviet tanks in Budapest	
1957	March: Rome treaty (EEC)	PCF denounces EEC
	May: Mollet defeated in Parliament	
	June: Bourgès-Maunoury government	
	September: Bourgès-Maunoury falls	
	November: Gaillard government	
1958	April: Gaillard falls	
	Demonstrations in Algeria for '*Algérie française*'	
	13 May: Right-wing military coup in Algiers	PCF denounces coup and organises 'anti-fascist' demonstrations
	Pflimlin government	
	June: President Coty calls on de Gaulle	
	De Gaulle government includes SFIO, MRP and Independents	PCF votes against de Gaulle
	September: Referendum on new constitution approved by 80% of the voters	PCF votes against referendum; loses many previous supporters
	October: Foundation of UNR	
	November: General Election (Victory for pro-Gaullist parties)	PCF representation in Parliament reduced to 10 seats
	December: De Gaulle elected President of the Fifth Republic	

Year	Main developments, especially in France	Main developments in the PCF
1959	January: Debré appointed Prime Minister	
		June: 15th congress
1960	January: 'New franc' introduced Ultras' revolt in Algeria Pinay leaves government February: French nuclear bomb exploded April: PSU founded	
1961	January: Referendum on self-determination for Algeria April: Ultra-right putsch collapses	Servin-Casanova affair
		May: 16th congress
	April–December: OAS terrorist attacks	
1962	March: End of Algerian war (Evian agreements) April: Debré resigns Pompidou becomes Prime Minister	September: PCF call to SFIO: '*Marchons côte à côte et frappons ensemble*'
	October: Presidential election by universal suffrage approved by referendum Censure motion against Pompidou Parliament dissolved	
	November: General Election (Gaullist UNR–UDT: 233 seats; SFIO: 66 seats; Radicals & left-wing clubs: 39 seats)	PCF gets 21.7% of the poll at the first ballot and 41 seats
1963	March–April: Miners' strike May–June: SFIO congress sticks to 'Third Force' but accepts 'defensive' *unité d'action* with Communists	PCF supports miners' strike

Year	*Main developments, especially in France*	*Main developments in the PCF*
	December: SFIO endorses Defferre as presidential candidate	PCF demands agreement on a common programme before it will support a joint left candidate
1964	January: Defferre rules out negotiations with PCF	
		May: 17th congress (Waldeck Rochet elected General Secretary)
		July: Thorez dies
	October: Khrushchev falls	
	November: Formation of CFDT	
1965	May: Defferre launches 'Big Federation' of non-Communist left	
	June: Collapse of 'Big Federation'	
	Defferre withdraws candidacy	
	September: Formation of FGDS	
	Mitterrand offers to stand as single left candidate in presidential election	PCF supports Mitterrand
	December: Presidential election (Second ballot: De Gaulle: 54.5%; Mitterrand: 45.5%)	
1966	February: France withdraws from NATO	
		March: Argenteuil CC meeting (Ideology & culture)
	December: FGDS–PCF electoral agreement	
1967		January: 18th congress
	March: General Election (Gaullists: 233 seats; FGDS: 117 seats; Centre: 44 seats)	PCF gets 25.5% of the poll at the first ballot and 72 seats
	May: 24-hour General Strike	PCF supports 24-hour strike
1968	May: Students' revolt	

Year	Main developments, especially in France	Main developments in the PCF
	Sit-in strikes	
	Grenelle negotiations	
	June: General Election (Gaullist UDR: 349 seats; FGDS: 57 seats; Centre: 31 seats)	PCF gets 20% of the poll at the first ballot and 34 seats
	July: Couve de Murville becomes PM	CC meeting to discuss May–June events
	August: Military intervention in Czechoslovakia	PCF condemns military intervention
		December: Champigny Manifesto ("Advanced democracy")
1969	April: De Gaulle resigns after defeat in referendum	
	June: Presidential election (Pompidou elected)	Duclos gets 21.5% of the poll at the first ballot
	Chaban-Delmas becomes PM	
	July: Foundations of new Socialist Party (PS)	
1970		February: 19th congress
	November: De Gaulle dies	May: Garaudy expelled
1971	June: PS Epinay congress (Mitterrand becomes First Secretary)	
		October: *Changer de cap* (party programme)
1972	March: *Changer la vie* (PS programme)	
	April: EEC extension to Britain, Ireland and Denmark approved by referendum	
	June: PS and PCF sign agreement on Common Programme	Marchais's CC speech on Common Programme
	July: Messmer becomes PM	
		December: 20th congress (Marchais becomes General Secretary)
1973	March: General Election (Gaullist URP: 268 seats;	PCF gets 21.3% of the poll at the first ballot and 73

Year	*Main developments, especially in France*	*Main developments in the* PCF
	UGDS: 102 seats)	seats
1974	April: Pompidou dies	
	May: Presidential election (Giscard: 50.8%; Mitterrand: 49.2%)	PCF supports Mitterrand
		October: 21st (Extraordinary) congress ('Union of the French people')
1976		February: 22nd congress ('Socialism in the colours of France')
	August: Chirac resigns as PM Barre appointed PM December: Chirac founds RPR September: Breakdown of left summit to discuss 'updating' of the Common Programme February: Formation of UDF	
	March: General Election (RPR: 153 seats; UDF: 104 seats; PS: 104 seats)	PCF gets 20.6% of the poll at the first ballot (PS: 22.6%) and 86 seats
		April: CC meeting (reply to *contestataires*)
1979		May: 23rd congress
	June: European elections (RPR: 16.1%; UDF: 27.4%; PS–MRG: 23.7%; abstentions: 38.8%)	PCF lists receive 20.6% of the poll
	December: Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan	PCF supports military intervention in Afghanistan
1980		January: PCF–CPSU communique (open acknowledgement of differences)
1981	April: Presidential election first ballot	Marchais gets 15.3% of the poll
	May: Mitterrand beats Giscard at second ballot	

Year	*Main developments, especially in France*	*Main developments in the PCF*
	of presidential election (Mitterrand: 51.7%; Giscard: 48.2%)	PCF supports Mitterrand
	June: General Election (PS gets absolute majority with 269 seats; RPR: 85 seats; UDF: 62 seats)	PCF gets 16.1% of the poll at the first ballot and 44 seats
	Mauroy appointed PM	
	June: PS–PCF agreement	
	Second Mauroy government	4 Communists in the government
1982		February: 24th congress (admits 'delay' in working out an original strategy)
1983	March: Municipal elections (setback for the left)	
	Government reshuffle	
	Government launches *plan de rigueur*	PCF against *plan de rigueur*
	December: PCF–PS joint Declaration	
1984	March: Government announces its steel plan	
	April: steelworkers' march on Paris	PCF supports steelworkers' march and puts forward its own counter-plan
	In Parliament, Mauroy seeks a vote of confidence	Communists vote for the government
	June: European elections	

Appendix 7: Interviews with three PCF leaders (April 1984)
(Brief summary)

Interview with Pierre Juquin, member of the Politbureau

How do you envisage the PCF's future?

We have adopted a new strategy and now our great historic task is to build the Communist party anew so that it can fully apply the new strategy. This is the long-term recovery we envisage, and it might take twenty to twenty-five years to achieve.

What about the immediate present?

At the moment, the left no longer enjoys majority support in the country. The trend can be reversed and this is what we are fighting for.

What is the present state of the party, numerically and ideologically?

Our membership and influence are stationary. We are neither declining dramatically nor advancing fast enough. On the whole, party members support the leadership, but there is bound to be some confusion, partly because most Communists were traumatised by the 1977 and 1981 events, with the result that they are not sufficiently on the offensive, and partly because the party has changed so much in the past six years that the novelty has not yet been fully assimilated.

Has the PCF become archaic, as some people assert?

Our revolutionary party would become archaic only if the revolutionary solution ceased to be the only way out of the capitalist crisis. On the other hand, we would deserve to be labelled archaic if we stuck exclusively to the working class and ignored its allies in the struggle for socialism.

Why does the PCF want to stay in the government? What's in it for you?

If you put it like this, I would say that the immediate advantage is nil. But from the long-term point of view, our participation legitimates our new strategy in that it shows that Communists are capable of managing the country's affairs. Our government presence is not tactical but strategic.

Will the PCF continue to criticise what it regards as the negative aspects of the government's policy?

Of course!

But if you intend to go on criticising, why did you give the government a vote of confidence?

We expressed our confidence in its general policy and aims.



So, what do you make of Mauroy's statement that he will not shift his ground on the steel plan?

At this stage, Juquin gave a broad smile and said:

We shall see. Whatever Mauroy may say, the government's steel plan is not realistic and will have to be revised through negotiations. The people's intervention will be decisive.

What about foreign policy?

Objectively, the government's foreign policy is on the whole consistent with the principles laid down in the June 1981 PCF–PS declaration. As for making a big issue of the aspects with which we disagree, say on the question of the missiles, it would only strengthen the right-wing trend in the PS and might lead to our exclusion. If this happened, we would get little sympathy, especially as there is no mass peace movement in our country.

Interview with Francette Lazard, member of the Politbureau

As you are in charge of party education, how do you see your task?

We try to provide our members with an understanding of the contemporary period. The three main topics are the historic significance of the period, the world today, and the Communist project today. The latter can be summed up as the will to change French society in the direction of democratic socialism.

Do you agree with the view that the 13 April demonstration was a failure?

No, I do not. It represented the beginning of a great popular movement. We've not had anything like it for a long time.

Would you agree with Garipuy that districts should not send homogeneous delegations to the party congress?[1]

Our leadership is certainly not against Garipuy's suggestion.

Do you think that the PCF fully appreciates and supports the women's struggle for emancipation?

Yes. As a woman, I feel quite at home in the party. Moreover, our party links the issue of women's liberation with broad social issues, such as jobs.

Would you say that the PCF is archaic?

No. We have an original solution to get the country out of the crisis. Moreover, when we reject the criterion of financial profitability, we do not do so in the name of obsolete dogma, but in the name of efficiency. The criterion of growth which we propose instead is truly modern because it corresponds to the present stage of our economy.

Interview with Roger Martelli, historian and member of the CC

What is the present ideological state of the party?

Good on the whole, but there is a certain amount of frustration due to the magnitude of what has yet to be done and to the gap between the party's



proposed solutions and public opinion. Add to this the fact that our members are still trying to grapple with the new ideas launched by our latest congresses.

What, in your view, is the PCF's main task today?

It must strive to become a credible force so that people would look upon it as a 'useful party'. In order to achieve this, the PCF must be at the same time the party which best understands modern realities and the party of social change. The two go hand in hand.

How do you justify the PCF's continued government participation?

We joined the government in order to implement the policies laid down by Socialists and Communists in June 1981. Our continued presence is one of the ways of putting pressure on the PS to make it carry out its 1981 pledges. Although a repetition of 1947 is not entirely ruled out, I think the PS would prefer to keep the Communists in the government because it believes that this is how it can best achieve its aim of marginalising our party.

I assume that you yourselves do not want to be marginalised, but rather believe that there are greater opportunities for your party and the working people in post-1981 France. What are they?

What we can achieve at governmental and parliamentary level is rather limited. But we can campaign among the people to urge them to make full use of such structural reforms as democratisation, decentralisation and extended nationalisation. With regard to the latter, our work in nationalised firms can yield significant results, because it involves a case by case attempt to introduce new criteria of management. I say case by case because we must not confuse nationalised firms with the state; each one of them enjoys a good deal of autonomy.

Should you not be more critical of the negative aspects of the government's foreign policy?

We must avoid at all costs the formation of a *de facto* alliance between the PS and the right on foreign policy issues and the resurrection of the myth that we are a 'foreign party'.

As a historian who has made a special study of the 1956 events, what do you think of the PCF's reaction to the CPSU 20th congress?

I do not quite agree with what you say in your book[2] when you write that Thorez endorsed the public aspects of the congress. I believe that, unlike Togliatti, he failed to suggest the exploration of entirely new paths. To him, the 20th congress simply meant the reassertion of old concepts which the movement had discarded during the cold war. It was more a question of going back to 1936 and 1946 than of branching out in a really novel direction.

Notes

1 Cf. Ch. 9, p. 265.
2 Cf. Ch. 8, p. 230. I think that Roger Martelli is right when he says that



Thorez – and the PCF leadership as a whole – failed to work out a new strategy in 1956, but all the same, there was *some* novelty in his approach, especially on the issue of the peaceful transition to socialism; the latter had only been implied in Thorez's 1946 *Times* interview.

Select bibliography

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